

St. Magnús of Orkney

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St. Magnús of Orkney

A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context

By

Haki Antonsson



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PREFACE

This book is an offspring of my doctoral dissertation that I defended at the University of St Andrews, 2000. I have previously published articles on a number of topics in this book, and I refer to those where appropriate in the text.

I wish to offer my gratitude to the following people for the help and encouragement they gave me during various phases of composition: Robert Bartlett, Bergsveinn Birgisson Barbara Crawford, Peter Foote, Julie Kerr, Marcella Mulder, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Michael Staunton, Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson and Björn Weiler. I also wish to thank collectively my colleagues at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Bergen, for providing an ideal venue in which to complete this work. Any mistakes are, of course, entirely my own responsibility.

A brief note on personal names is in order. I have chosen to spell personal names more or less according to the scholarly tradition that is mainly associated with each historical person. Thus I refer to kings Knut Eriksson of Sweden, Knud IV of Denmark and Canute, king of England and Denmark. I am aware that this leads to a degree of inconsistency which, however, I believe is preferable to an enforced “old-norsing” of all names.

I wish to dedicate this book to my parents, Anton Erlendsson and Þuríður Björnsdóttir, who have provided me with invaluable support throughout.

INTRODUCTION

One is hard pressed to think of a topic that involves as many diverse aspects of medieval Scandinavian society as the cults of the princely martyrs. For one thing, the literature and liturgy composed in the saints' honour represent some of the oldest known writings from the region.¹ In Denmark the slaying of King Knud IV in the year 1086, which according to one commentator represented the strangest event in the history of the Danish Church since the introduction of Christianity,² inspired the first known attempt to write a history of that country. One can also mention that the papal recognition of Knud's sanctity in 1099/1100 provided the incentive for the earliest known writing of music in Denmark.³ In the Northern Isles the fragmentarily preserved Life of St Magnús, composed in the latter half of the twelfth century, is the first work of prose which deals with any aspect of Orcadian history. Perhaps surprisingly, the earliest and most successful Nordic royal cult, that of St Ólafr of Norway (d. 1030) did not, as far as one can establish, generate much hagiographic writing in the first century of its existence. Still, *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, probably written in the 1170s, and the laudatory poem *Geisli* (c. 1152) are among the earliest Christian compositions emanating from Norway. The hagiography on the Scandinavian princely martyrs was heavily indebted to imported literary models and, indeed, foreign men of letters. Thus Englishmen were largely responsible for the hagiography on St Knud of Odense, St Knud Lavard (d. 1131) and St Magnús of Orkney. From this perspective the cults of the royal or princely martyrs indeed reflect the increasing cultural and ecclesiastical ties in the eleventh and twelfth centuries between Scandinavia and the more established Christian countries.

The emergence of these cults is difficult to divorce from the strengthening of princely power in the same period. In each case

¹ For a brief assessment of the significance of hagiography in the earliest stages of writing in Scandinavia see the contributions of Kværndrup (Denmark), Kratz (Iceland and Norway) and Morris, B. (Sweden) sub. 'Saints' Lives', pp. 562–563. See also Cormack 1994, pp. 32–41.

² Gertz 1907, p. 1.

³ Berzagal 1980, p. 153.

we encounter a secular ruler placing his authority and resources behind a cult of a murdered or killed relative. Knud IV was canonized on the insistence of his brother, King Erik ejegod, and Earl Rögnvaldr Kali of Orkney (1137–1158/59) commenced the building of St Magnus Cathedral in honour of his executed uncle. In the early phase the most important promoters of the cult of King Ólafr were the saint's half-brother, King Haraldr harðráði (1046–66), and son, Magnús Ólafsson góði (1035–47). Likewise, it seems that King Knut of Sweden (1167–c. 1195/96) had a say in the establishment of the cult of his father Erik Jedvardson (d. 1160). By personally associating their authority with a saintly relative these rulers strengthened their own claim to power. The cults were thus princely in every sense of the word.

From approximately the second half of the eleventh century onwards a noticable shift can be detected towards a more centralised form of rulership in the Nordic dominions. The town-based court became increasingly important as a centre of power, a development which marked the beginning of the end for itinerant rulership. In this context it is not without relevance that in some cases these new centres of authority—most notably Kirkwall in Orkney, Trondheim/Nidaros in Norway—had the corporal relics of the princely saints as their foci. By the end of the thirteenth century the Nordic realms each had a native heavenly patron who was neither a bishop nor an abbot but a sanctified ruler. Indeed the dominant position of the princely martyr-model of sanctity in the Northern countries is illustrated by the fact that it was not until the emergence of the Icelandic cult of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson of Skálholt, at the very end of the twelfth century, that a cult of a native confessor achieved any notable popularity in Scandinavia.

But it would be unsatisfactory to examine the cults of the princely saints exclusively in terms of secular politics. As will be shown, the role of ecclesiastics was both crucial in their establishment and maintenance. In the eleventh and the twelfth centuries the Scandinavian Church was in the process of transforming itself from a missionary body to a more organized institution, albeit one which still worked in close co-operation with the secular authority. The princely cults played an important part in this development in the sense that they provided focal points for closer co-operation between secular rulers and men of the Church. In point of fact the shrines of the martyred

rulers became the most treasured possessions of bishoprics (in Orkney and Denmark) and archbishoprics (in Sweden and Norway) alike.

It is difficult to separate the early history of the princely cults from their associated hagiographic literature. Indeed in some cases the literature constitutes our main source for the earliest stages of the cults. Additionally, a study of the cults of princely martyrs must consider not only their institutional framework but also the underlying emotive aspect: most significantly the prevalence of violent death as the prerequisite for sanctity. In the twelfth century the veneration of secular figures which had come to a violent end was not exclusively confined to the high-profile princely cults already mentioned. The Scandinavian sources, and the Old Norse corpus in particular, contain a number of (albeit fragmentary) references to figures of political importance who met violent ends and were subsequently considered holy. Not only do these minor “cults” hold an important key to people’s perception of sanctity in this period, but they also reveal what ingredients were essential for the establishment of successful princely cults.

It must be emphasized from the start that this study neither purports to be a general nor a comprehensive study of the cults of the Nordic princely saints and their hagiography. Rather my aim is to base my investigation on the literature and the early stages of a single cult: that of Earl Magnús of Orkney, born c. 1075 and executed in 1116/1117 on the orders of his cousin and co-ruler Hákon Pálsson. In the process I will place his hagiography and cult within a Scandinavian and, where appropriate, wider European context. This discussion will include, *inter alia*, the Norwegian cults of St Ólafr and (to a lesser extent) St Hallvard, the Danish cults of St Knud of Odense and St Knud Lavard as well as the Swedish cult of St Erik. Anyone approaching this subject is indebted to Erich Hoffmann’s seminal study into the phenomenon of the Scandinavian princely cults.⁴ If, in the course of this study, I disagree with some of Hoffmann’s conclusions it is because his work has led me to examine the subject from different perspectives. Scandinavian history of the twelfth century, let alone the eleventh century, does not lend itself to easy certainties. The bulk of the written sources are either hagiographical

⁴ Hoffmann 1975.

in nature or composed long after the events they purport to describe took place (or indeed both). The best a student of this period can hope to achieve is to understand the nature of these sources; consequently I make no apology for indulging in what some historians would consider literary analysis.

It must also be strongly stressed that what follows is neither a study of the spread of St Magnús' cult within or outside Scandinavia, nor the legacy of his cult in the form of church dedications, pilgrimage and pictorial art.⁵ Rather the line of research can be summed up as follows. The earliest stage of the cult of St Magnús is examined as well as the literary corpus on the saint and both then are placed within their historical and literary contexts. This study can be seen as a microhistory of sorts, if only in the sense that the sparse evidence for the Orcadian cult and its comcommitant literature provides a spring-board for a wider examination of various aspects relating to sanctity and hagiography in the early Christian North.

⁵ Some of these topics are covered in Søliland 2004.

PART ONE

THE HAGIOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

1.1. *The St Magnús Corpus*

The medieval narrative sources pertaining to the life and martyrdom of St Magnús Erlendsson, earl of Orkney, and the emergence of his cult are the following: *Orkneyinga saga* (*The Saga of the Earls of Orkney*),¹ *Magnús saga skemmri* (*Magnús saga the shorter*) preserved in a manuscript from the second half of the fourteenth century, ÁM 235 fol.,² *Magnús saga lengri* (*Magnús saga the longer*) preserved in three paper manuscripts from c. 1700, ÁM 350 4to, ÁM 351 4to and ÁM 352 4to,³ and a Latin *Legenda de sancto Magno* of uncertain date, found in an Icelandic manuscript from the beginning of the eighteenth century, ÁM 670 f 4to,⁴ and (in a slightly different version) in the Scottish *Breviarium Aberdonense* printed in 1509/10.⁵ The *Legenda* is abbreviated from a Latin Life of St Magnús composed by a certain *magister* Robert, according to my estimation in the 1170s (see ch. 1.6). Although Robert's work has not survived in its entirety, a substantial part of it was incorporated into *MSL*. Attached to *MSL*, *MSS* and the Magnús section of *OS* are miracle collections of the saint.

To date, the main published studies on the Magnús corpus are Einar Ól. Sveinsson's chapter on *OS* and the Magnús sagas in his

¹ *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal (København, 1913–16). Hereafter referred to as *OS*.

² *Orkneyinga saga. Legenda de Sancto Magno. Magnúss saga skemmri. Magnúss saga lengri. Helga þáttir ok Úlfs*, ed. by Finnogi Guðmundsson. Íslensk fornrit 36 (Reykjavík, 1965), pp. 311–332. Hereafter referred to as *MSS*.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 335–383. Hereafter referred to as *MSL*. The main manuscript is ÁM 350 4to, copied from *Bejarbók*, an MS from c. 1400 which was almost completely destroyed in the Copenhagen fire of 1795. The edition of the saga used in this study follows this manuscript.

⁴ *The Orkneyingers' saga*, tr. by G. W. Dasent. *Icelandic Sagas* vol. III. Rolls Series (London, 1894), pp. 302–304. Hereafter referred to as *Leg*.

⁵ *Breviarium Aberdonense* (Edinburgh, 1510). Reprinted Spalding and Maitland Club (London, 1854). Pars Hyemalis, fo. lxxxvii–fo. lxxxix. Printed in *The Orkneyingers' saga*, pp. 305–322. For the liturgical material on St Magnús see De Geer 1985, pp. 118–143.

Sagnaritun Oddaverja,⁶ Finnbogi Guðmundsson's preface to his *Íslensk fornrit* edition of *OS* and the Magnús sagas,⁷ and Magnús Már Lárusson's study of the saint's cult in Iceland.⁸ These studies did not aim to place the Magnús corpus within its proper hagiographic and literary context. Hence this will be the primary object in the first part of this book.

Orkneyinga saga

The earliest of the three Icelandic works is *Orkneyinga saga*, dating from the first half of the thirteenth century. In its (near) entirety the saga is only preserved in the fourteenth-century codex *Flateyjarbók* where it is interpolated into accounts on the two missionary kings of Norway, Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr Haraldsson.⁹ The textual history of the work is somewhat complicated by the fact that the surviving *OS* is a revised version of a lost earlier saga. Whereas the original redaction of the work is believed to have terminated in 1171, the revised version ends in 1206 with the death of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson of Orkney. Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, which he probably completed in the fourth decade of the thirteenth century, was the major influence on the revised version of *OS*. The extent to which the Magnús section of the saga was affected in the process is unknown and probably impossible to reconstruct, although it is generally accepted that it was only at this later stage that the miracles of the saint were attached to the saga.¹⁰ Not surprisingly the sections of *OS* that deal with St Magnús and his adversary, Hákon Pálsson, are closely entwined. Indeed in chapters 34–46 (in the modern editions) the saga focuses as much on Hákon as it does on the saintly Magnús. Magnús only assumes the centre state with the description of his martyrdom on Egilsay, his subsequent miracles and episcopal recognition of his sanctity. The author's occupation with

⁶ Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1937, pp. 16–39.

⁷ *Orkneyinga saga*, pp. xliii–lxi, cxxviii–cxli.

⁸ Magnús Már Lárusson 1963, pp. 470–503.

⁹ *Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon & C. R. Unger. 3 vols. (Oslo, 1860–68), vol. I, pp. 219–229, 558–560; vol. II, pp. 176–182, 404–519, 529–530.

¹⁰ Chesnutt 1993, pp. 456–457.

Hákon may reflect his reliance on a now lost *Hákonardrápa* ('Lay of Hákon'),¹¹ or even a separate saga about him.¹²

Einar Ól. Sveinsson argued that the author of *OS* had been influenced by a hagiographic work on St Magnús. He drew attention to, on the one hand, the stark contrast between the hagiographic flavour of some of the passages that deal with the life and martyrdom of the earl and, on the other hand, the classical saga-style prose which otherwise distinguishes the saga. The sole hagiographic work on St Magnús that is known with certainty to pre-date *OS* is Master Robert's Latin Life. To account for the hagiographic nature of the Magnús section in *OS*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson suggested that the saga-writer had made use of this work, perhaps in an abbreviated form.¹³ Alternatively it could be argued that the hagiographic style of the passages in question reflects the nature of the subject matter rather than any influence from another source. In other words, the telling of the life and death of an officially recognised saint required a different stylistic approach than, for instance, the description of the killing of the more bellicose Rögnvaldr Brúsason earlier in the saga.¹⁴ In Old Norse prose a shift in style within one and the same work is not an uncommon occurrence. It is well known, for instance, that in the Sagas of the Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*), the narrative tone often changes when the scene of action moves from Iceland to foreign lands. In this context mention can be made of *OS* colourful description of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali's pilgrimage to the Holy Land which he undertook in the early 1150s.¹⁵ Away from the political strife of the Orkney earldom the narrative assumes a fantastic tinge which recalls in some respects the Icelandic adventure sagas of the Middle Ages, the Legendary sagas (*Fornaldarsögur*). In short, authors were often inclined

¹¹ *OS*, p. 108. *MSL*, p. 352.

¹² *The Orkneyinga Saga*. A new transl. with introd. and notes by A. B. Taylor (London, 1938), pp. 72–74.

¹³ Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1937, pp. 27–35.

¹⁴ *OS*, pp. 76–79. A mention can be made of Duke Knud Lavard's murder in the thirteenth-century *Knýtlinga saga*. Although the saga author does not follow any known hagiographic work on the death of the Danish martyr, his account of the betrayal of Knud and his subsequent murder conforms to the hagiographic pattern that is generally associated with martyrs of his type (see ch. 1.4). *Danakonunga sögur. Skjöldunga saga—Knýtlinga saga—Ágrip af sögu Danakonunga*, ed. by Bjarni Guðnason. Íslensk fornrit 35 (Reykjavík, 1982), pp. 251–255. See Bjarni Guðnason's comments, *ibid.*, pp. cxliv–cxlviii. This however applies only to the plot and not the language or the style of the saga account.

¹⁵ *OS*, pp. 230–262.

to adopt the style that they deemed best appropriate to their subject matter.¹⁶

Still, it is worth noting that the killing of Rögnvaldr Kali, whose sanctity is recognised by the author, is recounted in a non-hagiographic, “saga-style” manner (see further ch. 2.4).¹⁷ Similarly the death-scene of Earl Haraldr Eiríksson ungi, whose saintly reputation is also noted, is devoid of hagiographic gloss.¹⁸ Hagiographic works on these two earls have not survived and none are known to have been composed in their honour. Further, the hypothesis that a Life of St Magnús influenced the author of *OS* is strengthened by a textual parallel between the *Leg.*, which as mentioned, is based on Robert’s Life, and *OS*. Most notably, *OS* tells that Magnús went to his martyrdom “*sem honum væri til veizlu bodit . . .*”,¹⁹ which echoes the words of the *Leg.*: “*Eductus ergo hilari mente et intrebido animo quasi ad epulas invitatus . . .*”.²⁰ *OS* also refers to an oral source behind the description of Magnús’ martyrdom: “*Svo segir Holdbode, rettordr bonde i Sudreyjum, fra vidrædu þeirra; hann var þa met Magnusi annarr hans manna, er þeir gerdu hann handtekinn*”.²¹ Abbo of Fleury’s Life of King Edmund, composed about 985, includes a comparable reference to an eyewitness at the scene of martyrdom. Abbo states that he received information (albeit indirectly) from the king’s armour-bearer who claimed to have been present when the king of East Anglia was brutally killed by a Norse war-band.²² Although references of this kind

¹⁶ Not much has been written about the style of *OS*. However, for an analysis of narrative shifts in the saga’s later chapter see Jesch 1994, pp. 365–379. *Idem* 1992, pp. 336–355.

¹⁷ *OS*, pp. 309–315.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 321–324.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117. “as though he was bidden to a feast . . .”. *The Orkneyinga Saga*, p. 210.

²⁰ *Leg.*, pp. 307–308.

²¹ *OS*, p. 117. “So says Holdbodi, a trustworthy bondi from the Hebrides, concerning their conversation. He was one of the two men with Earl Magnús when they made him captive”. *The Orkneyinga Saga*, p. 210. Interestingly, *OS*, in a different context, mentions a man from the Hebrides by the name of Holdboði. Early in the year 1136 Vilhjálmr, the Orkney bishop, sent the unruly Sveinn Ásleifarson to a certain Holdboði Hundason so that he might escape the wrath of Earl Páll. *OS*, pp. 171–172. Thus Holdbodi Hundason had links with Bishop Vilhjálmr, the figure responsible for the canonization of Earl Magnús (see ch. 2.3) according to *OS*. It cannot be ruled out that the namesakes are one and the same person. If that is the case the reference to the eyewitness in *OS* could point to an early hagiographic work on St Magnús which was composed on the initiative of the Orkney bishop.

²² *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi. The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, ed. by Francis Hervey (London, 1907), p. 8. For a discussion of this detail see Whitelock 1969, pp. 218–219.

are not un-common in hagiographical literature,²³ it is probably hypercritical to dismiss here out of hand the testimony of *OS*.

D. A. Seip, the eminent philologist, suggested that the author of *OS* had made use of a hagiographic work on St Magnús in Norn, the Orcadian vernacular. He asked whether “the *Vita Sancti Magni* [was] not only composed but also translated into Norn in the Orkneys?”²⁴ Seip isolated unfamiliar spellings of Old Norse and argued that they derived from a vernacular translation of an early Life which, he furthermore suggested, had probably been composed at the court of Rögnvaldr Kali (1137–1158/59), the first Orkney earl to take an interest in Magnús’ cult (see ch. 2.2). Of the eight cases of Norn spellings in *OS*, six appear in the Magnús section of the saga. Seip did not, however, draw attention to the fact that the examples do not derive from the main narrative but rather from the section of the saga which deals with the translation of St Magnús and his miracles.²⁵ It is not at all certain whether the early Life included the miracle accounts of St Magnús; the possibility cannot be excluded that they were first written in the vernacular and only at a later stage attached to the Magnús sagas. In other words, it is imperative to distinguish between the *vita* of the saint and the posthumous miracles attributed to him. Seip’s hypothesis that *OS* was influenced by a Life of St Magnús in Norn should be qualified by this observation.²⁶ The suggestion that a hagiographic work in Norn influenced

²³ See for example, Colgrave 1935, pp. 224–226.

²⁴ Seip 1968, pp. 93–96.

²⁵ *OS*, p. 131, 18; p. 132, 19; p. 135, 21; p. 136, 4; p. 137, 5; p. 138, 7. The second numerals refer to the line-numbers in Nordal’s edition.

²⁶ Seip is not the only scholar to have argued that an Orcadian composition underlies the Magnús section of *OS*. Thus Macrae-Gibson claimed “that the whole lively episode leading up to his [i.e. Magnús’] death can fairly be seen as a literary artifact of Scottish Norse, incorporated in Orkneyinga Saga”. Macrae-Gibson, 1989, p. 423. Macrae-Gibson sought to prove the indigenous origin of *OS* as a whole and thus his ideas relating to the Magnús section of the saga constitute only a part of his argument. In this section of the work he finds two expressions which he considers “not characteristic of Icelandic”: “*Þa eindagade Hákon iall med false ok fagrmælum* [“with false heart and fair words”] *stefnuðag hinum sæla Magnusi ialli . . .*”. “*Þetta líkade Magnusi ialli sem fullkomnum heilhuga, an allra grunsemda svika ok agirndar . . .*” [“without any suspicions, deceit or greed of gain”]. The peculiar expressions mentioned by Macrae-Gibson are marked by bold letters. Macrae-Gibson also found the contrast between the overbearing behaviour of Hákon and the passive stance of Magnús not “a characteristic Icelandic saga feature”. *Ibid.*, p. 423. The citation of two “un-Icelandic” expressions hardly supports the conclusion that a Norn Life of St Magnús was used in the composition of *OS*. In matter of fact these expressions appear to echo *magister* Robert’s Latin life. For instance,

the Magnús section of the saga must be supported by a thorough examination of its language. Such a study has yet to be undertaken.

Magnúss saga skemmri (MSS)

A work of thirty-five chapters, is believed to have been composed in the second half of the thirteenth century and its author seems to have followed the revised version of *OS*,²⁷ although he may have had access to an older redaction than the one *Flateyjarbók* preserves.²⁸ Prior to focusing on the life and death of Earl Magnús, a brief synopsis is given of *OS* from the reign of Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson (c. 1014–c. 1065) to the time of Magnús and Hákon. After this introduction the saga follows *OS* closely, indeed often verbatim. Although the saga-form of *MSS* makes it less than ideal for liturgical purposes, it is probably correct to relate its composition to the earliest stage in the development of St Magnús' cult in Iceland.²⁹ As *MSS* does not include much material that is not found in *OS* (apart from two miracles and a reference to a *translatio* of St Magnús' relics into his cathedral, see below p. 13) the work is of marginal relevance to this study.

Legenda de sancto Magno (Leg.)

It is evident that the content of *Leg.* was intended for liturgical purposes. The shorter version of the work appears in the Scottish *Breviarium Aberdonense* which contains liturgical material for feast days of saints, many of them of Scottish pedigree.³⁰ The longer version

“Placuit hoc beato utpote homini serenatæ conscientie, qui vivere Christus et mori lucrum. Ad prædictam igitur insulam, in qua mansio sua sita erat, cum duabus longis navibus, nullam mali habens suspicionem, pervenit”. *Leg.*, p. 306. Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1937, p. 28.

²⁷ For this dating see *Orkneyinga saga*, p. cxxi.

²⁸ Magnús Már Lárusson 1963, pp. 489–490.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 487–488.

³⁰ A detailed study of the Magnús material in the *breviarium* has not been undertaken. See, however, De Geer 1985, pp. 120–123. It is evident that the inclusion of the Orcadian saint is in line with the general editorial philosophy behind the collection. As one scholar has pointed out, there appears “to have been a conscious attempt to spread the net over the whole of Scotland, to include saints from every diocese and to have a sprinkling of obscure and little-known local saints as well as national heroes . . .”. MacQuarrie 1997, p. 7. For an introduction to the *Breviarium Aberdonense* see Macfarlane 1985, pp. 231–246. Macfarlane points out that the editors worked mainly from Scottish liturgical books already in use but rarely from Lives of saints, chronicles or more substantial sources of that nature. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–240.

(of c. 800 words), preserved in ÁM 670 f 4 to, begins by stressing Magnús' noble background and his exemplary youth. However, when Magnús becomes tainted by the semi-pagan culture and violence of Orcadian society he strays off the right path and participates in less than pious activities. When his father dies a certain Hákon, "*filius patruí sui*", occupies Magnús' dominion through violent means. During Magnús' exile in England—where he visits the court of King Henry I as well as notable holy places—Hákon extends his authority to Caithness. When Magnús returns to the earldom he is betrayed and murdered by Hákon at a peace meeting on Egilsay.

The significance of the *Leg.* lies in the fact that its main, and apparently only, source was Master Robert's *Vita Sancti Magni*. Thus it constitutes the sole preserved medieval prose work on St Magnús that is independent of the Old Norse corpus.³¹ At what date the *Leg.* was adapted from Robert's Life is, however, not clear.

Magnús saga lengri (MSL)

The key work within the preserved Magnús corpus, has been dated on stylistic grounds to the fourteenth century. Sections of the saga are written in the so-called *florissante*-style or *skríðstill* that became fashionable in Iceland at the end of the thirteenth century and was adopted by prominent hagiographers in the following century, such as Bergr Sökkason, Arngrímr Brandsson and Árni Laurentiusson (or Lárentiusson).³² An earlier date for the saga has been argued, not altogether convincingly, on account of a passage in Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (which he composed 1264/65).³³ That

³¹ Curiously, the possibility has not been raised that the *Leg.* was put together from *MSL* as we know it. However, there is one detail in the work that appears to exclude this option. *Leg.* tells that when King Magnús berfættir of Norway effectively forced Magnús Erlendsson to join him on his military expedition to the British Isles, the future saint was in Shetland with his father and brother. *Leg.*, p. 304. This detail neither appears in *MSL* nor *OS/MSS*. The composer of *Leg.* must have been following another source, in all probability Robert's Life of St Magnús.

³² The term *skríðstill* was coined by Widding 1965, pp. 127–136. See also *idem* 1979, pp. 7–10. The distinguishing features of this style are the appliance of elaborate imagery and complicated diction.

³³ Helgi Guðmundsson 1997, pp. 284–285. This is a scene in which St Magnús, in tandem with St Ólafr and St Columba, appears in a dream to King Alexander II of Scotland. There the physical appearance of the Orcadian saint is described in the following fashion: "*annar madr syndiz honum hár ok grannvaxinn ok ungligr, manna fríðastr ok tiguliga búinn*". *Flateyjarbók* vol. III, p. 178. "The second seemed to him tall,

the Icelandic author of *MSL* made use of Robert's Latin Life is attested in the following two references:

Meistari Roðbert, er sögu ins heilaga Magnúss jarls hefir samt ok diktat í látínu, byrjar svá Prologum sem hér má heyra.³⁴

Master Robert, who hath collected and composed the Saga of the holy earl Magnus in Latin, so begins his Prologue as may here be heard.³⁵

Meistari Roðbert dictaði þessa sögu á látínu til virðingar ok sæmdar inum heilaga Magnúsi Eyjajarli at liðnum tuttugu vetrum frá hans písl.³⁶

Master Robert wrote this story in Latin to the worship and honour of saint Magnus the isle-earl, when twenty winters were passed from his martyrdom.³⁷

Judging from these words the said Robert wrote his Life of Magnús in 1136/1137, that is around or shortly after his sanctity was officially recognised by the bishop of Orkney and the building of St Magnus Cathedral had commenced (see ch. 2.3). One notable feature, hitherto ignored by commentators, is that neither *MSL* nor *OS* mention

slender, and youthful; the fairest of men, and nobly dressed". My own translation. Helgi sees a similarity between this passage and the depiction of the saint in *MSL*: "Magnús, son Erlends jarls, var hár maðr á vöxt, skönligr ok skjótligr ok styrkr at afti, friðr sýnum, ljóslitaðr ok límaðr vel, tiguligr í yfirbragði ok inn kurteisasti í öllu athæfi". *MSL*, p. 346. "Magnus, the son of earl Erlend was a tall man of growth, quick and gallant, and strong of body, fair to look on, lighthued, and well-limbed, noble in aspect, and the most courteous in all his behaviour". *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 249. Helgi argues that Sturla was influenced by this passage in *MSL* when he came to describe the appearance of St Magnús in *Hákonar saga*. To deduce from this single parallel that *MSL* was written prior to 1264/65 is a somewhat dubious exercise. True, three of the five adjectives that appear in the *Hákonar saga* passage also figure in *MSL* (*hár*, *friðr*, *tiguligr*). But two of them, *hár* and *friðr* are hardly rare in Old Norse literary descriptions of physical appearance. Moreover, the word *tiguligr* appears in a different context in *MSL* than it does in *Hákonar saga*. In the latter work *tiguligr* is used to describe Magnús' attire whereas in *MSL* it indicates the saint's physical bearing. The fact that the three words appear in the same order is a rather weak argument for a textual connection. Although the tripartite formula—i.e. height/weight, beauty/ugliness, and the description of garments or general bearing—is by no means the rule in Old Norse descriptions of this nature, it is hardly a rare one. Thus in the very same scene in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, St Columba is depicted according to a similar formula: "hinn þriðji var miklu mestr vexti ok allra manna ófrynilegastr hann var mjök framsnoðinn". In short, Helgi's attempt to re-date *MSL* fails to convince. In any case, although I find even that unlikely, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* could have influenced the author of *MSL*.

³⁴ *MSL*, p. 336.

³⁵ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 239.

³⁶ *MSL*, p. 372.

³⁷ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 270.

the *translatio* of the saints' relics into the new cathedral in Kirkwall. The author of *MSS* found the silence on this matter unsatisfactory for having told about the miracles of St Magnús, he adds the following passage:

Þá er Rognvaldr Kali jarl, systursonr ins helga Magnúss jarls, var kominn til ríkis í Orkneyjum ok settisk um kyrrt, þá lét hann marka grundvöll til Magnúskirkju í Kirkjuvági ok fekk smíði til; ok gekk sú smíð bæði vel ok skjótt, ok er þar ágæt smíð ok vel vandat. Síðan var þangat fluttr heilagr dómr Magnúss jarls, ok verða þar margar jarteinir at hans helgum dómi. Þar er nú ok byskupsstóll, sá er fyrr var at Kristskirkju í Byrgisheraði.³⁸

After Earl Rognvald Kali, nephew of the Holy Earl Magnus, had come to power in Orkney and settled down, he had the ground-plan drawn up for St Magnus' Cathedral in Kirkwall and hired builders for the work. The structure progressed rapidly and well: it is a remarkable building, on which great pains were bestowed, and later the holy relics of Earl Magnus were transferred to it. Many miracles continue to take place there. Nowadays it is the episcopal seat, the same that used to be at Christ Church, Birsay.³⁹

This sole reference to the *translatio* of Earl Magnús into his cathedral is clearly an interpolation by the Icelandic author of *MSS*. But it is hardly surprising that a Life composed 1136/1137 does not allude to the translation of the relics into St Magnus Cathedral. By a conservative estimate it would not be until the 1140s, at the earliest, that the building of the cathedral had reached the stage where the relics could be enshrined within its choir.⁴⁰ Indeed the *translatio et miracula* section, as opposed to the account of Magnús' *vita* and *passio*,⁴¹ focuses only on Magnús' *elevatio* and enshrinement in Christ Church in Birsay on December 16 (which became one of his two feast days) and the subsequent *translatio* of his relics to the existing church in Kirkwall.⁴²

³⁸ *MSS*, p. 330.

³⁹ *Magnus' Saga. The Life of St Magnus Earl of Orkney 1075–1116*, tr. with an introd. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Oxford, 1987), p. 41.

⁴⁰ Cruden 1988, p. 82.

⁴¹ It is, of course, not at all certain that these two main components of the hagiographic corpus on Magnús—*vita et passio*, on the one hand, and *translatio et miracula* on the other hand—were composed at the same time or by the same author. Indeed a further distinction can be made between the *translatio* (and the associated miracles) and the *miracula* which take place after the translation to Kirkwall.

⁴² *OS*, p. 134.

As I hope becomes clear in the course of this study, the Life which underlies *MSL* was in all probability composed some four decades later than implied by the Icelandic author. Still, we are left to explain the appearance of this date in *MSL*. A scribal error has been suggested,⁴³ and considering that the sole witness to the saga is a paper manuscript from c. 1700, this option should not be dismissed out of hand. The working hypothesis, however, can be put forward that *magister* Robert's Life was essentially an elaborated version of a hagiographic work written in 1136/1137. Quite possibly the dating of this first Life of St Magnús appeared in the second Life composed by *magister* Robert which was later incorporated into *MSL*. Hereafter this hypothetical early work will be referred to as **Vita*.

On one hand the Icelandic composer of *MSL* drew heavily on Robert's passages about the life and martyrdom of St Magnús. On the other hand he appears to have generally followed *OS*, even taking up parts of it verbatim, in his narrative sections.⁴⁴ The most straightforward method of identifying those passages that stem from Robert's Life is to isolate those sections where the reader is directly addressed. It should be noted, however, that the Icelandic author included his own prologue before that of Master Robert's. This device of placing a new introduction in front of an older one is adopted from Latin writings and it appears, for instance, in Bergr Sökkason's *Tveggja postula saga Jóns og Jakobs*, *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* and in *Strengleikar*, a thirteenth-century Norwegian translation of the *lais* of Marie de France.⁴⁵

1.2. *Robert's Life of St Magnús and its Components*

MSL is constructed from two main building blocks: the Icelandic *OS* and Robert's Latin Life of St Magnús. It should be observed, however, that *MSL* includes passages that neither appear in *OS* nor owe affinity

⁴³ E.g. Finnur Jónsson 1922, pp. 651–652. Finnur suggests that the scribe read the numeral xx for the original Mxx. Certainly the transcriber got the numerals wrong when he wrote that Magnús had been killed in 1091 which suggests a misreading (Mxcj) from Mxj (1111). See Magnús Már Lárusson 1963, pp. 493–494.

⁴⁴ Finnbogi Guðmundsson concluded that the author of *MSL* had before him a version of *OS* which closely resembled the one found in *Flateyjarbók*. *Orkneyinga saga*, p. cxxxiv.

⁴⁵ Sverrir Tómasson 1988, p. 234.

to Master Robert's erudite reflections on St Magnús' life and martyrdom. For instance, particular to *MSL* is the description of how Magnús acquired his share of the earldom. *OS* and *MSS* tell that following King Magnús berfættir's death in 1103, Hákon received the title of earl from the three co-rulers of Norway (Sigurðr, Eysteinn and Ólafr). Hákon had only enjoyed sole rulership for a brief period when Magnús appeared on the scene and demanded his inheritance. The matter was referred to King Eysteinn and when Magnús came to see him the Norwegian king "gave him a very cordial welcome, and gave up to him his inheritance—the half of the Orkneys, and the title of Earl".⁴⁶ This same information is also relayed in *MSL* but additionally the saga tells how, prior to his visit to Eysteinn, the people of Caithness chose Magnús to the earldom:

... þá er inn heilagi Magnús var á Skotlandi, frétti hann andlát Erlends jarls, föður síns, ok þau önnur tíðendi sem fyrr var ritat. Ok sem hann hafði verit slíka stund í hirð Skotakonungs sem honum líkaði, sæmðr af konunginum gjöfum ok göfgu föruneysi, fór hann á Katanes ok var þar af öllum virðuliga tekinn, hirtr ok haldinn ok þegar kosinn ok tignaðr jarls nafni, vinsæll ok virðuligr öllum guðs vinum.⁴⁷

When the holy Magnus was in Scotland he learnt of the death of earl Erlend his father, and those other tidings which before were written. And when he had been such time at the court of the Scot-king as liked him, honoured of the king with gifts and noble company he fared to Caithness, and was there worthily received of all, kept and cared for, and at once chosen and honoured with the title "earl", beloved and worshipful to all the friends of God.⁴⁸

Also noteworthy is the account in *MSL* of Hákon's take-over of the earldom:

Fór hann þá vestr um haf ok tók undir sik allt ríki í Orkneyjum með svá mikilli ágirni ok vitjanligri, at hann drap saklausan sýslumann Nóregskonungs, er þann helming eyjanna helt ok geymdi, er inn heilagi Magnúss átti, ok lagði þann veg undir sik allar Orkneyjar með ofriki, því at hálfar eyjarnar horfu til ins heilaga Magnúss af föðurligri erfð.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *The Orkneyinga saga*, 204. "[Eysteinn] tok vit honum forkunnar vel, ok gaf honum upp föðurlæifð sína, hálfar Orkneyjar, ok iállsnafni". *OS*, p. 109. *MSS*, p. 316.

⁴⁷ *MSL*, p. 349. This passage is echoed in one of the three Magnús *lectiones* in the *Breviarium Nidrosiense* printed in 1519: "Unde contigit eum de manu violenti regis et preditoris evadere et Cathaniam adire, vbi honorifice susceptus est". *Breviaria ad usum ritumque sacrosanctem Nidrosiensis ecclesie* (Paris, 1519). Facsimile edition by H. Buvarp and B. M. Borsum (Oslo, 1964), kk. vj.

⁴⁸ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 251.

⁴⁹ *MSL*, p. 350.

Then he fared west over the sea, and took under him all the realm in the Orkneys with so much greed and aggression that he slew the guiltless steward of the king of Norway, who held and looked after that half of the isles which Saint Magnus owned, and in that way laid under him all the Orkneys with violence; for half the isles fell to Saint Magnus by inheritance from his father.⁵⁰

OS does not refer to Hákon killing a steward of the Norwegian king and the compiler/author of *MSL* is unlikely to have invented this detail. As the Latin *Leg.* notes Hákon's brutal method of subduing the earldom it appears that the incident was included in Master Robert's Life. It was earlier observed (see footnote 31) that the *Leg.* tells that Earl Magnús was in Shetland when King Magnús berfætrr of Norway forced him to participate in his expedition to the British Isles. No other source mentions this and again one must conclude that it figured in Robert's work.

MSL also notes that Magnús visited King Henry I of England. It tells how Magnús becomes aware of Hákon's desire to remove him from the political scene and decides "to yield for a while to the envy and wrath of Hacon". He sets sails for England and arrives at the court of King Henry and for a whole year he is treated "as it be seemed a king to treat a noble duke". Before returning home he then visits holy shrines.⁵¹ *OS* makes no mention of this journey. The saga, like *MSS*, only tells that when Magnús had deserted King Magnús' retinue during the harrying of Anglesey in Wales, he stayed at the court of King Malcolm of Scotland and then "sometimes in Wales with a certain bishop; sometimes he was in England, or in various other places with his friends. [But] he did not visit the Orkneys during the life of King Magnus".⁵² Magnús' visit to England is also noted in both *Leg.*⁵³ and the *Responses in Breviarium Aberdonense*.⁵⁴

Two works, at least, have been lost from the equation: the original version of *OS* and that of Robert's Life. It is known that the author of *MSL* followed a text of *OS* that closely corresponds to one which is preserved in *Flateyjarbók*. In other words he did not rely on

⁵⁰ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 252.

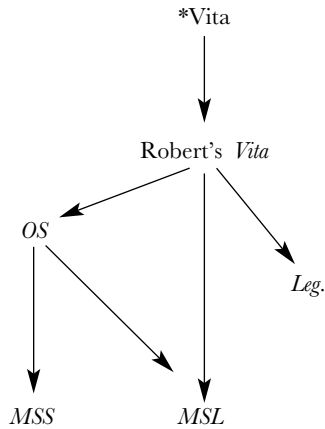
⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 257–258. *MSL*, pp. 356–357.

⁵² *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 201. *OS*, p. 104.

⁵³ *Leg.*, p. 305.

⁵⁴ *The Orkneyingers' saga*, p. 312.

the original *OS*.⁵⁵ The likeliest solution is that the material in question derives from Master Robert's work on Magnús. This, in turn, suggests that Robert incorporated Orcadian tradition into his work which the author of *OS* either chose to ignore or was not familiar with. Accordingly Robert's Life of St Magnús must have been more than an assemblage of exegetical utterances; the work was firmly placed within the context of Orcadian history. Admittedly the point cannot be conclusively proven but in all likelihood Robert relied for this context on a lost **Vita* of St Magnús. Here below is a simplified stemma of the likely relationship between the texts discussed above:



1.3. Magnús saga lengri and the Cult of St Magnús in Iceland

Peter Hallberg and Finnbogi Guðmundsson identified Bergr Sökkason, who in 1316/17 became a monk at Þingeyrar monastery and in 1325 abbot of the religious house of Munka-Þverá in northern Iceland, as the likely author of *MSL*. Finnbogi did not present any tangible evidence in support of Bergr's authorship, apart that is from citing *Laurentius saga* where he is said to have "put together" (*saman sett*) with great skill many saints' Lives in the vernacular.⁵⁶ Peter Hallberg on the other hand came to an identical conclusion by comparing the appearance of selected words in *MSL* with their use in Bergr's

⁵⁵ Magnús Már Lárusson 1963, p. 486.

⁵⁶ *Orkneyinga saga*, p. cxxxviii.

compositions.⁵⁷ Hallberg's methodology, which he applied to other fourteenth-century works beside *MSL*, has been questioned on the grounds that it does not sufficiently take into account the notable common characteristics that Icelandic works of hagiography share in this period.⁵⁸ But although it is hazardous to identify the author of *MSL* by name, we have reasonably good knowledge of the literary environment in which he was working.

As to the incentive for composing *MSL*, the most recognisable landmark on the horizon is the inclusion in 1326 of the St Magnús feast into the Icelandic liturgical calendar at Alþingi, the national assembly. The earliest reference to this event appears in *Annale Regii*, or *Konungsannáll*, compiled in the first half of the fourteenth century: "*logtekið a alþingi de corpore Christi. ok Magnus messa iarlls*".⁵⁹ The official recognition of the feast is also attested in two other fourteenth-century annals, *Skálholtsannáll*⁶⁰ and *Flateyjarannáll*.⁶¹ Interestingly, the one annal of the period that does not refer to this event is *Lögmannsannáll* but it nevertheless notes, under the same year, the adoption of the *Corpus Christi* feast into the liturgical calendar.⁶² *Lögmannsannáll* originates from northern Iceland and was almost certainly compiled by Einar Hafliðason (1307–1393), a priest close to Bishop Laurentius (or Lárentíus) of Hólar (d. 1331). Einar also composed a biography of Laurentius which includes the following passage relating to the introduction of the Eucharist feast in 1326:

aa odru are byskups doms Laur(encij) baud hann med rade allra lær-
dra manna j Hóla byskups dæme. ad festum corporis Christi skylldi
syngia hatidliga. sem summum festum. þuiat at það var nylega flutt
vt af herra Joni byskupe. var su hatid log tekinn a Alþingi. vm sumarit.⁶³

In the second year of Laurentius' time as bishop he stipulated, with the advice of all the learned men in the bishopric of Hólar, that Corpus

⁵⁷ Hallberg 1969, pp. 59–70.

⁵⁸ Sverrir Tómasson 1985, pp. 1012–1013. Jakob Benediktsson 1984, pp. 268–269. Johansson 2000.

⁵⁹ "Adopted into law *Corpus Christi* and the feast of Earl Magnús". My own translation. *Íslandske annaler indtil 1578*, ed. by Gustav Storm (Christiania, 1888, reprinted Oslo, 1977), p. 153. On the textual complications relating to medieval Icelandic annals, see Jakob Benediktsson 1993, pp. 15–16. *Árna saga byskups*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson (Reykjavík, 1972), pp. lxii–lxxx.

⁶⁰ *Íslandske annaler*, p. 205.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁶³ *Laurentius saga biskups*, ed. by Árni Björnsson (Reykjavík, 1969), p. 103.

Christi should be celebrated *summum festum* because the feast had been recently brought to the country by *sir* Bishop Jón. In the summer the feast was taken into law at Alþingi.⁶⁴

Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt (1322–1339), a Norwegian Dominican educated in Paris and Bologna, is here identified as the instigator of the *Corpus Christi* feast in Iceland.⁶⁵ The fourteenth-century annals and *Laurentius saga* show that it was on his initiative that *Corpus Christi* was declared an official feast. Could Bishop Jón have been behind the recognition of the feast of St Magnús on the same occasion?

Einar Hafliðason does not suggest as much in *Laurentius saga biskups*. But in light of Einar's silence about St Magnús in *Lögmannsannáll* it seems that he did not consider the adoption of this feast worthy of much attention. As noted this is in contrast to the other annals that mention the event in conjunction with the Eucharist feast. Naturally Einar's reticence regarding St Magnús in two of his compositions might reflect the differing nature of the two liturgical innovations. Whereas the Eucharist feast was a novel addition of some considerable theological interest and observed throughout Christendom,⁶⁶ the Orkney martyr was just another saint deemed worthy of official veneration. Still, it can scarcely be coincidental that *Lögmannsannáll* is also the one annal from the period that fails to note the translation of a Magnús relic to Skálholt *anno 1298*. Under that year *Flateyjarannáll* says: "*kom af helgum dómi Magnus jarls til Skálholtz . . .*"⁶⁷ Similar statements appear in *Skálholtsannáll*⁶⁸ and *Konungsannáll*.⁶⁹ The three annals also mention another translation to Skálholt, that of St Þorlákr's relics in 1292, and again *Lögmannsannáll* is silent.⁷⁰ Einar Hafliðason's

⁶⁴ My own translation.

⁶⁵ On Jón Halldórsson's contribution to the politics and literature of fourteenth-century Iceland, see Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson 1994 A. Jakobsen 1963, pp. 16–22. As with the *Corpus Christi* there is no evidence that the feast of the Orcadian martyr was officially adopted by the archbishopric of Nidaros. Indeed in 1464 the bishop of Skálholt complained that his diocese had been celebrating feasts of saints which did not figure in the archbishopric's liturgical calendar. Magnús Már Lárusson 1963, p. 481. De Geer 1985, p. 128.

⁶⁶ Rubin 1991, pp. 164–212.

⁶⁷ *Íslandske annaler*, p. 386. "Relic of Earl Magnús was brought to Skálholt". My own translation.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 197, 384.

enthusiasm for the veneration of saints in the diocese of Skálholt looks to have been limited.

Thus it seems that in the late thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century the bishopric of Skálholt had a special interest in the cult of St Magnús, an interest which was not shared to the same extent in the diocese of Hólar. It is tempting therefore to see Bishop Jón Halldórsson as the driving force behind the official sanction in 1326 of St Magnús' cult. If Einar's biographical subject, Bishop Laurentius of Hólar, had been intimately involved in this decision, one would expect Einar to have noted that fact. The above squares well with Margaret Cormack's analysis of the spread of church dedications and images relating to St Magnús which shows that in Iceland his cult first took roots in the diocese of Skálholt in the late thirteenth century.⁷¹ Four of the five churches dedicated to the Orkney saint are located in this diocese and a decade after the relic of St Magnús was translated into Skálholt Cathedral, Bishop Árni Helgason (1304–1320) is thought to have dedicated a hospital to the saint at Gaulverjabær.⁷²

All this considered it is not too far fetched suggest that the bishops of Skálholt promoted the cult of St Magnús in the first decades of the fourteenth century. Their effort culminated in its formal adoption at Alþingi in 1326 at the instigation of Bishop Jón Halldórsson. In addition, I would argue that in the wake of the translation of 1298 an effort was made to formalise an already existing practice in relation to the cult. In two of the earliest manuscripts of the law-code *Grágás* (*Konungsbók* and *Staðarhólsbók*), which date from c. 1250–c. 1270, we gather that Magnús' feast day was locally observed,⁷³

⁷¹ Cormack 1994, pp. 119–121. At first sight Cormack's conclusion appears to contradict Magnús Már Lárusson's argument that the Magnús cult was particularly prominent in the northern and western quarters of the country. Magnús Már Lárusson 1965, pp. 498–503. It should be noted, however, that whereas Magnús Már included in his study cultic evidence from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Cormack focused on the early stages of the cult in Iceland, that is to say the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century.

⁷² Cormack 1994 A, p. 121. It is known that the hospital was dedicated to Magnús although this is not mentioned in any of the annals. *Íslandske annaler*, pp. 149, 201, 341, 391.

⁷³ Cormack 1994 A, p. 20. Magnús Már Lárusson 1965, p. 480. *Grágás* (*Konungsbók*). *Íslendernes loobog i fristatens tid, udgivet efter det Kongelige Bibliotheks haandskrift*, ed. by V. Finsen (Copenhagen, 1852, reprinted Odense, 1974), p. 34. *Grágás* (*Staðarhólsbók*). *Efter det Arnarnagæanske haandskrift Nr. 334 fol*, ed. by V. Finsen (Copenhagen, 1879,

although it is unclear which of the two dioceses this refers to. The bishop of Skálholt had acquired a relic of St Magnús of some importance and, as suggested, then proceeded to have the martyr's feast-day celebrated throughout Iceland. The composition of *MSL* was in all probability undertaken against this cultic backdrop.

Shifts in literary style and religious sentiments should also be taken into consideration. The distinguishing features of early Icelandic hagiography (that is from the twelfth and early thirteenth century) were simplicity of style and an emphasis on unadorned narrative.⁷⁴ In the fourteenth century, as the Christian religion in general and the cult of the saints in particular had taken deeper roots, works of hagiography became more elaborate in style and reflective in content. The saga-like simplicity of the earlier Lives was superseded by a more sermon-like, exegetical, style of composition that emphasised to a greater extent the religious lessons which should be drawn from the saints' conduct. In this period older works were accordingly updated. For instance, Bergr Sokkason composed a new Life of St Nicholas although at least one Old Norse version of his *vita* existed at the time.⁷⁵ More impressively perhaps, the first half of the fourteenth century saw the updating of Lives of native saints, most notably that of the bishops of Hólar, Guðmundr Arason (1203–1237) and Jón Ögmundarson (1106–1121).

The composition of *MSL* fits well into the trend in this period of re-writing or re-editing older works of established saints. In *MSS* and *OS* the emphasis is on the narrative, the story itself, and less on the religious significance of Magnús' life and martyrdom. A note, for instance, can be made of the different manner in which the two texts depict his marital celibacy.⁷⁶ *MSS*, here following *OS*, tells thus:

reprinted Odense, 1974), p. 40. On the debate about this reference to St Magnús' feast in relation to the dating of *Konungsbók*, see *Grágrás. Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, ed. by Gunnar Karlsson et al. (Reykjavík, 1992), pp. xii–xiii.

⁷⁴ Þorleifur Hauksson and Þórir Óskarsson (ed.) 1994, pp. 183–196.

⁷⁵ Sverrir Tómasson 1982, pp. 25–41.

⁷⁶ Peter Foote has observed that the emphasis on Magnús' chastity in marriage could reflect an influence from Osbert of Clare's (composed in the 1130s) and Ailred of Rievaulx's (completed in 1163) Lives of King Edward the Confessor. Foote 1989, p. 72. See further John 1979, pp. 170–178. On virgin kings and princes in general see Elliot 1993, pp. 113–131. Elliot sees Magnús' celibacy as something of an anomaly in medieval hagiography for it was "contingent on his role as a public penitent". *Ibid.*, p. 268. I cannot see any explicit connection in the Magnús corpus between his celibacy and his rowdy youth.

Í öllum hlutum held hann ríkt guðs boðorð ok var meinlætasamr við sjálfan sik. Svá er sagt, at hann byggði svá með konu tíu vetr, at þau heldu hreinlifi, en er hann fann freistni á sér, þá fór hann í kalt vatn ok bað sér fulltings af guði.⁷⁷

[in] all things he strictly held God's commandments, and was unmerciful against his own self. So it is said that he abode with his wife for ten years, so that they kept their purity of life; but when he felt temptation coming over him he went into cold water and begged for support of God.⁷⁸

MSL includes a lengthy digression, generously sprinkled with biblical references, relating to Magnús' celibacy in which the saint is compared to a knight of God who battles daily against carnal temptations. God is presented as Magnús' feudal lord who rewards his vassal for his heroic self-control by bestowing sainthood upon him.⁷⁹

En með því at svá mælir Páll postuli, at engi kórónast nema sá, er lögliga stríðir ok karlmannliga til þjónar, á valdi þessi hallarhöfðingi ok stríðandi riddari höll þína, at þola dagligt stríð ok nálægan bardaga brennanda holds.⁸⁰

But for that the apostle Paul so says that no one is crowned save he lawfully strives and manfully works for it, so this courtly chief and warlike knight chose thy courts, to suffer daily strife, and the constant battle of the burning flesh.⁸¹

Like other Icelandic hagiographers of the fourteenth century the author of *MSL* was neither an original composer nor a straightforward translator.⁸² Rather his task was to mould existing sources into a hagiographic work in the vernacular. Bergr Sökkason, for instance, probably saw himself as a compiler or editor of older *vitae*. In his *Michaels saga* and *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* he uses expression such as “*skrifaðr ok saman sett*”, (“written and put together”), and “*saman lesit*” (“twined together”).⁸³ Árni Lárentíusson, in his preface to *Dunstanus saga* (“Saga of St Dunstan”), also resorts to similar phrases: “*Þui hefui ek saman lesid j fylgiandi frásögn þau æuenntyr sem miog hafua sta-*

⁷⁷ *MSS*, p. 317.

⁷⁸ *MSS* (Rolls Series), p. 288.

⁷⁹ On martial imagery in Icelandic hagiography see Hallberg 1987, pp. 160–161.

⁸⁰ *MSL*, p. 354.

⁸¹ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 255.

⁸² For a recent discussion of this aspect see Battista 2006.

⁸³ Fell 1962–65, pp. 357–358.

dit sundr-dreipt j imissum bokwm af . . . Dunnstano".⁸⁴ Although both Bergr and Árni drew their material from disparate sources, they clearly sought to shape their compositions into reasonably well-integrated works of hagiography.

In contrast, the compiler/author of *MSL* appears to have made little effort to treat the Old Norse and the Latin corpus on St Magnús in a similar manner. As noted above the distinctive quality of the saga is the weight given to Master Robert's exegesis and excursions as the story of Magnús' life and martyrdom unfolds. To the modern reader at least the integration of these two strands—Robert's exegesis on the one hand and the narrative of *OS* on the other hand—leaves much to be desired.⁸⁵ The impression is hard to escape that *MSL* was written in haste and/or by someone who had limited interest in stamping his authority on the material before him, partly perhaps because *magister* Robert's exegetical and learned style was already congenial to his taste.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, we can be certain that both cultic and stylistic reasons lay behind the writing of the new vernacular Life in honour of the Orkney martyr.⁸⁷

1.4. *The Narrative Pattern of Princely Martyrdom*

Erich Hoffmann rightly emphasised the influence that English hagiography had on the literature relating to the Scandinavian princely martyrs.⁸⁸ To a degree Hoffmann followed here in the footsteps of Lukmann who had drawn attention to the parallels between some English Lives of the eleventh century and the main hagiographic work

⁸⁴ "That is why I have put together in the following narrative the happenings that have been written in various books . . . on St Dunstan". My own translation. *Dunstanus Saga*, ed. by C. E. Fell. Editiones Arnemagnæanæ series b, vol. 5 (Copenhagen, 1963), p. 1.

⁸⁵ With this in mind it is difficult to envisage that luminaries of the northern "Benedictine school" of hagiographic writing, such as Bergr Sokkason and Arngrímr Brandsson, were involved in the composition of *MSL*.

⁸⁶ The rhetorical and learned style of *magister* Robert probably falls under *scholastico stilo* which some English twelfth-century men of letters, such as Gerald of Wales, applied to their hagiographic writings. See Bartlett 1983, p. 607.

⁸⁷ It is difficult to gauge how precisely a work like *MSL* could bolster a saint's cult. Julia Smith has made a similar observation regarding *vita*e in general (Smith 1992, p. 71). A study of this aspect has yet to be made in the context of Icelandic hagiography.

⁸⁸ Hoffmann 1975.

on St Knud of Odense, Aelnoth's *Gesta Swenomagni* written c. 1120.⁸⁹ But whereas Lukmann argued that various English hagiographic and historical works had influenced Ailnoth, Hoffmann confined his analysis to the hagiography on the princely martyrs.

Hoffmann found similar *topoi* in the Scandinavian and English hagiographies of the martyred rulers. Both contain motifs and themes such as the saint as a righteous ruler, the Judas-like figure who betrays him and the column of light that appears over his grave as a testament to his sanctity. It is hardly surprising that English hagiography influenced the corpus on the two Danish princely martyrs of the twelfth century, St Knud of Odense and St Knud Lavard, considering that their four hagiographers were quite possibly all of English origin.⁹⁰ More suspect, however, is Hoffmann's contention that the hagiography on St Ólafr of Norway served as a proto-type or model for the works on the Danish martyrs.⁹¹ The fact that *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, the oldest known prose hagiography on St Ólafr (often attributed to Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson of Nidaros, 1157/61–1188) was composed nearly half a century later than Aelnoth's work, makes this hypothesis somewhat problematic.⁹² Indeed Hoffmann seems to equate the early historical date of St Ólafr's martyrdom (1030) with the sources that describe the same event. Hoffmann's evolutionary model is difficult to uphold unless we envisage the unlikely scenario of English ecclesiastics adopting motifs from Icelandic skaldic poetry or, alternatively, a now-lost hagiographic work on the Norwegian saint.

Although Hoffmann did not deal with the Magnús corpus in his study, it is evident that Master Robert's *Vita Sancti Magni*, and by implication the Magnús corpus in general, is indebted to the English hagiographic tradition on princely martyrs. More specifically, the Life

⁸⁹ Lukman 1947–49, pp. 493–505. A Finnish doctoral thesis also argues that Life of St Erik of Sweden was influenced by English hagiography on royal martyrs. Jaakkola 1921. I have consulted the synopsis in German.

⁹⁰ The two hagiographers of King Knud IV are: the anonymous author of King Knud's first *passio* (c. 1095) (*Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, ed. by M. CL. Gertz (København, 1908–1912), pp. 62–71); Aelnoth of Canterbury (c. 1120) (*ibid.*, pp. 77–136); the two hagiographers on Knud Lavard are: Robert of Ely (c. 1135), (*ibid.*, pp. 234–241), and the anonymous author of his second Life (*Vita altera*) around 1170, *ibid.*, pp. 189–204.

⁹¹ Hoffmann 1975, pp. 101–127. “*doch war hier vor allem die hagiographische Tradition über Olaf den Heiligen von Norwegen vorbildlich für die Abfassung der Odenseliteratur über den heiligen Knud*”, *ibid.* p. 208. *Idem* 1981, pp. 118–119.

⁹² On this see Gad 1961, pp. 152–153.

can be placed within a sub-genre of that tradition: the pious and just ruler who is betrayed and murdered by a member of his own family for political purposes. The closest parallel from the Scandinavian sphere is found in the martyrdom of Knud Lavard, as portrayed in the saint's second *Vita* (*Vita altera*) composed on the occasion of, or not long after, his canonization in 1169 and the enshrinement of his relics in Ringsted the following year.⁹³ Knud, the son of King Erik Ejegod (1095–1103), is brought up with his cousin, Magnus the son of King Niels (1104–1134). When Knud comes of age, Niels entrusts him with the frontier duchy of Schleswig. Like Magnús of Orkney, Knud shows himself to be an exemplary ruler who defends his lands from pirates and treats everyone with fairness irrespective of their social status.⁹⁴ His vigorous support of the Christian religion and the Church is also noted.⁹⁵ Then, just as the popularity of Magnús arouses the envy of Earl Hákon, Knud's success evokes jealousy and fear in the mind of Magnus Nielsson.⁹⁶ Magnus, along with three associates, now plots the downfall of Knud Lavard. However, one initial conspirator by the name of Hakon pulls out of this pact when he realises that the plan is to betray and kill Knud.⁹⁷ In passing it can be mentioned that this episode bears a notable resemblance to a scene in the Magnús corpus where a certain Hávarðr deserts the retinue of Hákon Pálsson, on moral grounds, prior to the meeting on Egilsay.⁹⁸ The tension between Knud and Magnus increases until the latter suggests that they should meet in the woods, without escort, to settle

⁹³ For an introduction to the textual preservation of this work, see *The Medieval Danish Liturgy of St Knud Lavard*, ed. with an introd. and transl. by Michael Chesnutt (Copenhagen, 2003), pp. 3–86. I follow Chesnutt in referring to Knud's Life as *Vita altera* rather than the traditional, but somewhat misleading, *Ordinale*.

⁹⁴ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 191–192.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 193–194.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 195–196.

⁹⁸ *OS*, p. 114. *MSL*, p. 364. It is wholly uncertain whether this incident appeared in Robert's Life. The following passage from Ailred of Rievaulx's *De Spirituali amicitia*, completed around 1167, may throw light on how the desertion of Hákon and Hávarðr could have been elaborated on in sermons: "And far better did the servants of King Saul preserve their loyalty to their master by withdrawing their hands from blood in violation of his command, than Doeg, the Edomite, who as minister of the royal cruelty killed with sacriligious hands the priests of the Lord". Ailred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, tr. by Mary Eugenia Laker, introd. by Douglass Roby. Cistercian Fathers Series no. 5 (Kalamazoo, 1977), II, xl, p. 79. It is a curious co-incidence that Master Robert likens the killers of Earl Magnús to Doeg (see below ch. 1.6).

their differences. In a similar way as Knud Lavard ignores a warning directed at him from a boy who sings a ballad in his presence about a murder and betrayal within a family, so Magnús fails to heed a sign (a wave that arises from the calm waters and crashes over his boat) that his betrayal is imminent.⁹⁹

There are also noteworthy similarities between the Life of St Magnús and the Swedish Life of King Erik Jedvardson, *Vita S. Erii regis et martyris*, believed to date from the second half of the thirteenth century,¹⁰⁰ although its conspicuous brevity (and other features) has led to speculations that it is based on an earlier, more expansive, hagiographical text on the Swedish saint.¹⁰¹ When the Swedish throne becomes vacant Erik, whose royal pedigree is duly noted, is chosen to kingship by the “lords of that country and by all the people” because of his gentleness and pious life. Erik’s generosity towards the Church and his zealous efforts to uphold Christian worship are emphasised. Like Earl Magnús, Erik weds a woman of noble birth and abstains from sexual intercourse by bathing in cold water. Mirroring to some degree Magnús’ campaign against pirates, the Swedish king undertakes a crusade against the pagan Finns. However

[c]urrente igitur anno decimo regni Illustris Regis nostri, ut virum justum probaret tribulacio, et granum oppressum fructificaret uberius, antiquus hostis quendam Magnus nomine, Danorum Regis filium, eidem adversarium suscitavit, qui ex hereditate materna jus regnandi contra consuetudinem terræ, quæ alienigenas regnare prohibet, sibi perperam vendicabat. Unde et quendam Principem regni aliosque iniquitatis Satellites sibi associans, qui muneribus corrupti et promissionibus allecti in necem Regis Illustrissimi conspirarunt.¹⁰²

... in the course of the tenth year of the reign of our illustrious king, in order that tribulation might test the just man and the crushed seed might bear fruit more richly, the ancient foe incited as his adversary a certain man, named Magnus, the son of the king of the Danes, who

⁹⁹ *Vitæ Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁰ *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum mediæ ævi*, vol. I, ed. by E. G. Geijer and J. H. Schröder (Uppsala, 1828), pp. 272–276. For a general introduction to the hagiography on St Erik and a translation of the *Vita*, see Cross 1957–61, pp. 295–325. There also exists a shorter version of the Life which consists of only three *lectiones* (or alternatively, both may derive from a now lost text). This text is published and described in Jørgensen 1933, pp. 190–191. For an interpretation of the (minimal) difference between these *lectiones* and the *Vita* see Lönnroth 1959.

¹⁰¹ Carlsson 1944, esp. pp. 60–80. *Idem* 1952, pp. 217–250.

¹⁰² *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* I, pp. 275–276.

falsely claimed the right to rule by inheritance through his mother, contrary to the custom of the land which prohibits foreigners from ruling. Wherefore he allied himself with a certain prince of the realm and other wicked accomplices who, corrupted by gifts and enticed by promises, unanimously conspired for the murder of the illustrious king.¹⁰³

As a result of this unholy alliance St Erik was killed, not as Magnús Erlendsson and Knud Lavard in a saintly mode, but rather fighting bravely alongside his men. A similar hagiographic pattern appears in the Lives of those Anglo-Saxon princely martyrs who were killed in inter-dynastic power struggles, such as Edward the Martyr (d. 978/9)¹⁰⁴ and Æthelbert of East Anglia (d. 794).¹⁰⁵ As pointed out by Christine Fell the distinctive feature of this hagiographic sub-genre is the betrayal of the innocent prince and the sacrificial nature of his murder:

The emphasis is on the guilelessness of the victim, killed while engaged in some harmless or benevolent activity. Kenelm was out hunting, Æthelbert on a good-will visit to Offa. Edward was *both* out hunting *and* on a good-will visit to his brother Æthelred. The murder itself is presented in sacrificial terms stressing the “lamb” qualities of the victim, the Judas qualities of the killer.¹⁰⁶

Thus *magister* Robert, Aelnoth of Canterbury and Robert of Ely, the author of the first *passio* of Knud Lavard, were among the last English writers to work within and contribute to a tradition that stretched at least back to the second half of the tenth century. Although evidence for the cults of betrayed Anglo-Saxon princes can be found in the ninth century, as far as is known accounts of their life and martyrdom were first recorded in the tenth century,¹⁰⁷ a development which probably reflects a growing interest in the cult of saints from this period onwards.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Cross 1957–61, pp. 324–325.

¹⁰⁴ *Edward, King and Martyr*, ed. by Christine E. Fell. Leeds Texts and Monographs (Leeds, 1971).

¹⁰⁵ Edited by James, M. R., ‘Two Lives of St Ethelbert, King and Martyr’, *English Historical Review* 32 (1917), pp. 214–244.

¹⁰⁶ Fell 1978, pp. 10–11.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–14. *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints’ Lives. Vita S. Birini, Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi and Vita S. Rumoldi*, ed. and tr. by Rosalind C. Love. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1996), pp. xxxiii–xxxix. See also Campbell 1986, pp. 216–218.

¹⁰⁸ Rollason 1989, pp. 165–195. But for the argument that saints’ cults were more popular in early Anglo-Saxon England than is often assumed see, Thacker 1992, pp. 167–169.

Still, it would be wrong to assume that this hagiographic pattern was exclusively confined to England and the Scandinavian sphere for it also appears in works on princely martyrs from Central and Eastern Europe. A comparison can be made, for instance, with the tenth- and eleventh-century Lives of the martyred duke of Bohemia, St Wenceslas (d. 929 or 935), and the princes of Kievan Rus', the brothers Boris and Gleb (d. 1015).¹⁰⁹ Of the Western European passions of princes it is that of St Magnús which most closely resembles these Slavic works.¹¹⁰ N. W. Ingham has divided the early Lives of the three saints mentioned into thematic sections.¹¹¹ The similarities in the Magnús corpus are put in brackets:

- i) A brother of the saint conspires with evil men, holding stealthy meetings with them, and plans to kill the saint. ["And when the army was mustered, the Earl makes it known to them that he means so to settle up with Earl Magnus at their meeting, that they would not both of them [be rulers] over Orkneys [thereafter]. Many of his men showed themselves well-pleased at his plan, adding to it many wicked suggestions. Among the worst of those to acclaim his plan were Sigurd and Sighvat Socks". *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 208].
- ii) The murderer uses deceit and cunning, pretending to love his brother but enticing him to a place where he can be betrayed. ["And after some time had passed, Earl Hakon with false heart and fair words, called a meeting on a day appointed between himself and the blessed Earl Magnus, to settle it that nothing should disturb or nullify their fellowship and the established peace just made between them". *The Orkneyinga saga*, pp. 205–207].
- iii) The saint is warned about the fratricide but rejects the warning (either from disbelief or out of principle). [On the way to the

¹⁰⁹ For a translation of the Kievan Lives, see *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, ed. and tr. by Paul Hollingworth (Harvard, 1992) and for St Wenceslas, *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*, ed. and tr. by Marvin Kantor. Michigan Slavic Translations 5 (Ann Arbor, 1983). *The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia. Sources and Commentary*, ed. and tr. by Marvin Kantor (Evanston, 1990).

¹¹⁰ Ingham 1984, pp. 31–54. See also *idem* 1973, pp. 7–8. Ingham seems to have *MSL* primarily in mind here.

¹¹¹ "We can identify an impressive sequence of story elements that are common to most or all of... [the following texts]: The First and Second Slavonic Lives, *Crescente fide christiana* and Christian's Legend of Wenceslas; the chronicle, *Skazanie*, and *Ctenie* about Boris and Gleb". Ingham 1984, pp. 37–38.

rendezvous a wave rises from the calm sea and crashes on the place where Magnús is sitting. He himself interprets this as an evil omen and a sign of Hákon's intent. His followers urge him to return; Magnús replies "Our voyage shall still go on, and may God's will be done therein". *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 207].

- iv) The site of the murder is away from the prince's own territory, and he is virtually undefended. [Egilsay is on neutral territory and Magnús arrives with only a small contingent compared to Hákon's].
- v) The killing takes place in the morning, after the saint's activities of the night before have been described. [Magnús has mass sung and the next morning he is executed].
- vi) He usually has time to pray (and attend matins). [Just before he is executed Magnús prays; in *MSL* he attends morning mass].
- vii) The murder is done as though from an ambush; the victim is suddenly surrounded by several men, who close in on him by stages. [This holds true for *MSL* which tells that Magnús was captured inside a church].
- viii) The saint does not resist his attackers. [Magnús is compliant throughout].
- ix) He is stabbed to death, the actual killing being done by henchmen, not by the brother himself. [Hákon orders his cook to perform the deed].
- x) The body is mistreated and/or neglected. [Magnús' mother asks Hákon that she be allowed to bury her son properly].
- xi) The slaughter and robbery of the saint's followers take place immediately [Hákon treated Magnús' followers harshly].
- xii) The remains of the saint are retrieved and entombed with appropriate honors. [Magnús' mother is given his body which she buries at Christ Church on Birsay from where the remains are translated at a later date to Kirkwall].
- xiii) Divine vengeance is visited upon the murderers, who suffer "evilly" for their crime. ["It is also said of the men who had been most deep in treachery against Saint Magnus the Earl that most of them died wretched and miserable deaths". *The Orkneyinga saga*, pp. 212–213].

One scholar has noted that the martyrdom of St Magnús contains some intriguing parallels with that of St Gleb. For instance, both martyrs attempt to persuade their adversaries to spare their lives and,

strangely, both are executed by cooks.¹¹² Moreover, a link can be found between the Orkney saint and the Central and Eastern European princely saints. In a Russian litany dating from the late twelfth century the Kievan martyrs appear in tandem with St Ólafr, St Knud of Odense and St Magnús.¹¹³ But unless we put forward the implausible hypothesis that Master Robert had been familiar with Slavic *vitae* the possibility of a direct influence between them and the Magnús corpus can scarcely be entertained. Rather, what we are confronted with is a hagiographic pattern—which of course closely corresponds to Christ's passion—that was adopted independently by hagiographers working in the more peripheral, relatively newly-converted parts of Europe for the purpose of describing political killings of princely figures in terms of martyrdom.

1.5. *The Literature on Princely Martyrs and the Periphery*

Around the time of Magnús' death William of Malmesbury wrote the following words which he attributed to Pope Urban II as he preached the First Crusade at Clermont: "For all those barbarous peoples who in far-distant islands frequent the icebound Ocean, living as they do

¹¹² Price 1993, pp. 108–109. English hagiography also contains examples of the actual killing being carried out by a henchman of the saint's adversary; see for instance *St Edward, King and Martyr*, pp. 9–11. James, 'Two Lives of St Ethelbert', p. 240. In a *vita* of Kenelm the Mercian prince is killed by a swineherd. *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, p. 75. One can surmise that this motif had its origin in the shameful connotations associated with being killed by a social inferior. Cubitt 2000, p. 79.

¹¹³ Lind 1990, pp. 1–21. In part Lind's article is a challenge to accepted notions regarding this litany. Lind shows that, in particular, Dvornik is mistaken in his identification of Western saints such as St Ólafr (whom he believed was King Ólafr Tryggvason) and St Magnús (whom he assumed was the German St Magnus of Fuss). Dvornik 1947, pp. 38–39. The appearance of these Western European saints in this litany has been interpreted as sign of Bohemian influence. However, Lind points out that the Kievan principality had considerable ties, especially through dynastic marriages, with Scandinavia well into the twelfth century (see ch. 3.1). Lind does not though refer to N. W. Ingham's highly relevant study (Ingham 1968, pp. 121–136). There appears to have been a tendency in the medieval period to confuse St Magnús of Orkney with his saintly namesake from Germany. Most notably, in the late thirteenth-century *Swedish Legendary* he assumes the place of St Magnus of Kölbígg and the famous dance associated with that town is relocated to Orkney. *Et fornsvenskt legendarium*, vol. II (Stockholm, 1858), pp. 875–880. For the literary context of this work, see Chesnutt 1980, pp. 158–163.

like beasts—who could call them Christians?”¹¹⁴ Although it is uncertain whether Urban II uttered these words on this occasion, or others to the same effect, they are still indicative of the image which many ecclesiastics and men of letters had of the outlying regions of Christian Europe such as Eastern Europe, the Nordic lands and the so-called Celtic fringe. Although Christian in name they were invariably seen as pagan or semi-pagan in reality.¹¹⁵ Even within the Nordic sphere itself a “learned” prejudice of this nature can be detected. Sweden in particular, is often portrayed in the Old Norse sources as a barbarous and almost heathen country. For instance, *OS* and *MSL* tell how Hákon Pálsson visited a pagan soothsayer during a stay in that country in order to gauge his future.¹¹⁶ Saxo Grammaticus, the Danish historian writing in the early thirteenth century, emphasised the religious backwardness and political disunity of the Swedes with the purpose of bringing into starker relief the more advanced condition of the Danes.¹¹⁷ It is a sentiment of this sort that the Icelandic compiler/author counters in his prologue to *MSL*. The saga’s opening sentence sets the tone:

Lof, dýrð ok heiðr ok æra sé al máttigum guði, lausnara várurum ok skaparara, fyrir sína margföldu mildi ok miskunnsemi, er hann veitir oss, er byggjum á utanverðum jaðri heimsins, ok eptir meistaranna orðtæki, er svá setja í sínar bækur, at þeim sýnist sem vér séum komnir út ór heiminum.¹¹⁸

Praise glory and splendour and honour be to Almighty God, our redeemer and maker, for his manifold mercy and grace, which he bestows on us who dwell on the uttermost edge of the world; so that after the saying of the masters who so set it in their books, it seems to them as though we were come out of this world.¹¹⁹

These remote lands have been blessed by God’s grace who has granted Norway, Orkney and Iceland five illustrious saints:

¹¹⁴ “nam omnem illam barbariem quae in remotis insulis glatiale frequenter oceanum, quia more beluino uicitat, Christianam quis dixerit?” William of Malmesbury. *Gesta Regum Anglorum. The History of the English Kings*, vol. 1, ed. and transl. by R. A. B. Mynors, completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1998), iv, 347, 7, p. 601.

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, Bartlett 1982, pp. 268–270.

¹¹⁶ *OS*, pp. 94–97. *MSL*, pp. 341–343. On this episode see footnote no. 229, p. 57. See also Lindow 1995, pp. 8–31. Holmberg 1976, pp. 166–191, and Lid 1975, pp. 58–66. Foote 1993, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ B. Sawyer 1985, pp. 696–697.

¹¹⁸ *MSL*, p. 335.

¹¹⁹ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 239.

Þessir eru: inn heilagi Ólafr konungr ok inn háleiti Hallvarðr, frændi hans, er prýða Nóreg með sínum helgum dómum; inn mæti Magnús Eyjajarl, er birtir Orkneyjar með sínum heilagleik, hverjum til sæmdar eptirfarandi saga er saman sett. Hér með eru blessaðir biskupar, Johannes ok Thorlacus, hverir Ísland hafa geislat með háleitu skini sinna bjarttra verðleika. Því má sjá, at vér erum eigi fjarlægir guðs miskunn, þó at vér sém fjarlægir öðrum þjóðum at heims vistum; ok þar fyrir eigum vér honum þakkir at gera, sæmd ok æru alla tíma várs lífs.¹²⁰

These are, the saint king Olaf, and the exalted Hallvard his kinsman, who adorn Norway with their halidoms; the worshipful Magnus, the Isle-earl, who brightens the Orkneys with his holiness, to whose honour the aftercoming Saga is put together. Herewith are the blessed bishops John and Thorlak, who have enlightened Iceland with the exalted shining of their bright worthiness. By this it may be seen that we are not far off from God's mercy though we be far off from other peoples in our abode in the world; and therefore we are bound to pay Him thanks, honour and reverence all the time of our life.¹²¹

In one sense Master Robert can be seen as one of the pioneers in writing the history of a relatively newly converted Northern land. The fact that we are dealing with works of hagiography an objection could be made of use of the word "history" in this context. However, the subject matter which Robert and the other hagiographers of the Scandinavian princely saints were confronted with—the killing of a secular ruler by political enemies within a Christian setting—opened up channels of interpretation that were, by and large, closed to biographers of figures whose main criteria for sanctity were pious conduct and posthumous miracles. In contrast, *magister* Robert was confronted with the task of demonstrating the holiness of a secular prince whose claim to holiness essentially rested on the significance of a single event: his violent death. Unlike the self-sacrifice of the saints of the early Church, the murder or execution of a ruler (St Knud Lavard and St Magnús) or his death in battle (St Ólafr, St Knud of Odense and St Erik of Sweden) was, by itself, devoid of any inherent religious significance.

In the eighth century hagiographers of executed and murdered bishops in the Merovingian lands had confronted a similar dilemma. Bishops such as Leodegar of Autun (died c. 678) and Praiectus of Clermont (d. 676) had been killed at the hands of fellow Christians

¹²⁰ *MSL*, p. 335.

¹²¹ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 239.

in political machinations within Francia.¹²² In the lives of these ecclesiastics, which were written shortly after their death, the reality that they had suffered martyrdom as a result of political conflict could not be avoided.¹²³ Here for the first time, as far as I have been able to establish, hagiographers were confronted with the problem of interpreting physical martyrdom outside the obvious paradigm provided by the suffering of the early Christians at the hands of the Roman Empire.¹²⁴ And one method applied by these hagiographers was to present the martyrs' opponents as temporarily possessed by demons which sowed envy into their minds.¹²⁵ As will become apparent this theme is likewise elaborated on in the Lives of secular martyrs from the more peripheral regions of Christian Europe.

Similarly hagiographers of the princely saints were in need of a framework within which they could present the violent death of the rulers in terms of martyrdom. An effective way to achieve this objective was to place the death of the secular ruler within both a historical and salvific context; to portray it as the defining point in the history of the people over whom he had governed during his lifetime.¹²⁶ Thus in Robert's prologue the biblical Tabernacle denotes Christianity which Magnús, with his conduct during his life and the manner in which he died, both completes and protects:

Þvílíkt færir hverr sem hann hefir föng á í landtjald guðs sér til hjálpar ok miskunnar: einn gull, aðrir silfr, sumir gimsteina, sumir hafrahár ok rauðbukkaskinn; ok er slík förn eigi svívirðiliga virðandi, því at af slíku er gör yfirhöfn yfir landtjald guðs, at hlífa því ok verja þat fyrir vætu ok sólarhita. Þessi orð má svá glósa með fám orðum: Hverr kristinn maðr offri guði at gjöfum ok láni, sem hann hefir honum veitt, þat

¹²² For a translation of these Lives, see Fouracre and Gerberding 1996.

¹²³ Fouracre 1990, esp. pp. 28–29.

¹²⁴ “the involvement of many of these personalities in contemporary power struggles revived the ancient martyr-model through the sanctification of murdered episcopal power-brokers such as Aunemundus of Lyon, Leodegar of Autun, and Praietus of Clermont”. Thacker 2002, p. 29. A still earlier Merovingian case is, however, pointed out by Wood 1991, p. 97.

¹²⁵ Fouracre 1996, pp. 46–47. For instance from *Passio Leudegarii*: “But goodwill is always opposed by evil, and that age-old serpent, envy, always finds those among who it can sow strife”. *Ibid.*, p. 220. “Ebroin [the mayor of the royal palace and the one responsible for Leudgar's execution] acted in this evil way because he was being fuelled by the advice of men who were diabolically envious”. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹²⁶ Lars Boje Mortensen has pointed out how the earliest narrative literature on the saints created Christian historical myths for the relatively newly converted lands of Europe. Mortensen 2006.

er hann hefir bezt til: at guðs kristni, er landtjald þat, er Moyses gerði guði til þjónustu, merkir, verði til hlífðar ok styrkingar móti árásum sinna óvina. Gull merkir speki ok vizku, silfr hreinlifi, gimsteinar krap-taverk heilagra manna, hafráhar iðran synda, rauð bukkaskinn píslarvætti. Nú má lesandi maðr svá til hugsa, at þessar allar fórnir hafi heilagr Magnús offrat sínum drottni, sem hans lífssaga vátar.¹²⁷

Each one bringeth such things as he hath means to bring into the tabernacle of God, as a help to mercy for himself. One gold, others silver, some gem-stones, some goats hair and red buckskin; and such offerings are not to be contemptuously esteemed, for of such is made the covering over the tabernacle of God, to shield it and keep it from wet and sun-heat. These words may be so glossed with few words. Let every christian man offer to God of the gifts and grants which He hath bestowed on him, what he hath best That God's christianity is the tabernacle that Moses made for God's service, denotes its worth as a shelter and support against the onslaughts of his foes. Gold denotes wit and wisdom; silver chastity; gem-stones the miracles of holy men; goatshair the repentance of sins; red buckskin martyrdom. Now the man who reads may so make up his mind, that all these offerings hath the holy Magnus offered to his Lord, as the story of his life witnesseth.¹²⁸

The discussion of the Tabernacle frames Robert's Life of St Magnús. Immediately following the description of the martyrdom he adds an epilogue which echoes and further elaborates on the prologue:

... fyrir hans háleit eptirdæmi ok heilagan lifnað blómguðust fyrst í álfum Orkneyjaríkis inar fegrstu skipanir skærrar góðfýsi ok af inu helgustu lögmáli þessa dýrðarfulla píslarváts tóku margfalda aukning ins sæmiligista siferðis. Hann rak brott herrasætistól fjándans ór norðrætt heimsins ok setti í staðinn landtjald almáttigs guðs. Hann eyddi öllu illgresi ok upprætti með sinni predikan, en lét upp vaxa inu fegrstu blóma ok inn sætasta kornskurð ins hjálpsamligasta ávaxtar. Hann um sneri öllum beiskleika Orkneyja í sæmd ok sætleik heilagra siða.¹²⁹

For that because of his sublime example and holy life, first bloomed in the region of the realm of the Orkneys the fairest dispensations of pure good-will, and from the holiest decrees of this gloryful martyr sprung manifold increase of the most seemly virtue. He drove away the throne of the lordship of the Devil out of the north part of the world, and established in its stead the tabernacle of Almighty God. He withered and up-rooted all ill-weeds with his preaching, but let grow up the fairest flowers and the sweetest corn crop of the most

¹²⁷ *MSL*, p. 336.

¹²⁸ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 240.

¹²⁹ *MSL*, p. 370.

helpsome growth. He turned all the bitterness of the Orkneys into the seemliness and sweetness of holy habits.¹³⁰

The Tabernacle signifies the final victory of Christianity in the region. In a re-enactment of Christ's crucifixion and his triumph over the devil, Magnús' willingness to suffer martyrdom heralds the completion of one step in God's plan: the spread of the religion even to a remote land like the Northern Isles. True, Magnús does not convert his people to Christianity, for they are already Christians in name, but still his martyrdom represents a baptism of the earldom into the family of Christian people. Magnús' innocent blood has washed away the violent pagan past which heralds in a new era in Orkney.¹³¹

Below it will be argued that Robert's Life of Magnús was written in the 1170s, or at least not long after the composition of the early saintly biographies of the most famous martyr of twelfth-century Christendom, St Thomas of Canterbury. It has already been suggested that Robert re-wrote a *vita* from 1136/1137. In other words, Robert relied on this early Life for the immediate historical context of Magnús' martyrdom, a context he proceeded to interpret within a wider and more intellectually satisfying framework.

There is a precedent for such a re-working in the hagiographic corpus on King Knud IV of Denmark. Not long after his *elevatio* in 1095 an unknown clergyman of Odense composed *Passio sancti Kanuti regis et*

¹³⁰ *OS* (Rolls Series), p. 269.

¹³¹ The reference to a papal canonization of Magnús in *MSL* is also, I believe, an attempt to make the cult of St Magnús appear less parochial and provided it with a grander background. *MSL* tells that in the presence of the pope a bone of St Magnús miraculously transformed itself into a cross, just as it had done during an earlier trial by fire in Orkney. In response to this event the pontiff took "the purple martyr into the catalogue of saints; but that has been granted to few others in the North lands that he himself has done this". *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 273. A similar erroneous reference to a papal canonization of a local cultus also found in twelfth- or thirteenth-century hagiography relating to St Theodgarus (St Thøgar) of Denmark (*Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 16). As the shape-shifting bone appears in the Magnús liturgy it seems likely that the said description in *MSL* figured in Robert's Life. *Orkneyingers' Saga* (Rolls Series), p. 317. It is also likely that English influence lay behind the trial by fire of saints' relics in Scandinavia. There are two recorded cases of this procedure from Denmark and one from Norway, in relation to St Theodgarus (*Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 16), St Knud of Odense, (*ibid.*, p. 129) and St Ólafr. *Heimskringla* II, pp. 404–405. Considering that monks from Evesham were recruited to Odense it is worth noting that Walter, the abbot of that foundation (1077–1104), subjected relics he considered doubtful to an ordeal by fire. See *Chronicon abbatiæ de Evesham*, ed. by William D. Macray. Rolls Series (London, 1863), pp. 322 and 325. Ridyard 1987, pp. 204–205. Haki Antonsson 2006, pp. 154–159. See also footnote no. 119, p. 130.

martiris, a short and simple *passio* (undoubtedly intended for liturgical purposes) which contains many of the elements one would expect to find in a work of this kind.¹³² The emphasis is on Knud the just ruler, the protector and patron of the Church. The king suffers martyrdom at the hands of his own people who resent his introduction of tithes. It is hard to think of a more potent reason for dying in the cause of the Church in a relatively recently-converted society.¹³³ In short, the work is shaped by the interests and concerns of the clerical community in Odense that conducted the *elevatio* of the slain king (see ch. 3.3).

About two decades later Aelnoth of Canterbury, an English ecclesiastic resident in Denmark, composed his *Gesta Swenomagni regis et filiorum eius et passio gloriosissimi Canuti regis et martyris*. As the title implies the work is both a history of the Danish royal dynasty and a Life of St Knud IV. Thus unlike the author of the first Life of St Knud, Aelnoth places the martyrdom of the king within a broad historical framework. The work begins with the reign of King Sven Estridsen (1047–1074/76) and concludes in the reign of his son Niels (1104–1134). On this broad canvas Knud's martyrdom stands out as the central event in the history of the Danish people.¹³⁴ In the opening chapters the reader is reminded that the kingdom has only recently converted to Christianity.¹³⁵ It is located at the edge of the known world and only by God's grace has it been brought into the fold of the true religion. But before this came about the North was the playing-field of the devil and, paraphrasing Jeremias 1.14, the region from which all evil originates.¹³⁶ In Abbo of Fleury's Life of King Edmund the same biblical passage is evoked when the slayers of the saint, the Danish Vikings Inguar and Hubba, are introduced. The Danes have been "hardened with the stiff frost of their wickedness from that roof of the world where he fixed his abode who in his mad ambition sought to make himself equal to the Most High".¹³⁷

¹³² *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 62–71.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹³⁴ Sørensen 1986, pp. 53–55.

¹³⁵ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 78–85.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84. On geographical descriptions in twelfth-century Scandinavian works in Latin see Mortensen 2005.

¹³⁷ *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, p. 19. "[Nec mirum] cum venerint indurati frigore suae malitiae ab illo terre vertice, quo sedem suam posuit qui per elationem Altissimo similis esse concupivit". *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Here Abbo links the geographical remoteness of their native region and its abysmal spiritual state:

Talesque nationes abundant plurimæ infra Scythiam, prope Hyperboreos montes, quæ antichristum, ut legimus, secuturæ sunt ante omnes gentes, ut absque ulla miseratione pascantur hominum cruciatibus, qui caracterem bestię noluerint circumferre in frontibus. Unde jam inquietando christicolas pacem cum eis habere nequeunt, maxime Dani, occidentis regionibus nimium vicini, qui circa eas piraticam exercent frequentibus latrociniiis.¹³⁸

Nations of this abound in great numbers in Scythia, near the Hyberborean Mountains, and are destined, as we read, more than all other races, to follow Anti-Christ, and to batten without compunction on the agonies of men who refuse to bear on their foreheads the mark of the beast. Hence it results that they can observe no truce in harrying the worshippers of Christ, and this is true especially of the Danes, who, dwelling fatally near to the western regions, indulge continually in piratical raids upon them.¹³⁹

In one sense Aelnoth can be seen to be responding to Abbo when he refers to the same biblical passage. He does not reject the premise that the North had been a place of evil and pagan abomination. But with King Knud's martyrdom the reign of the devil has been terminated and the Danish people are finally able to make their belated entry into the Christian world. The north-wind must recede before the south-wind, heralding the real, as opposed to the nominal, adoption of Christianity.¹⁴⁰ And, of course, Pope Paschal II's canonization of King Knud, followed by the translation in the year 1100, represents a tangible vindication of this development.

Within the context expounded above the reference in *MSL* to "*ǫfándans herrastól*", "the throne of the devil", becomes more comprehensible. The martyrdom of St Magnús is interpreted in terms of a battle between God and the devil. The latter inspires Magnús' enemies to turn against him:

Nú með því at engi má vera Abel nema sá, er þolir ok reynir nízkú Kains ok ǫfund, ok inn helgi Ezechiel bjó með eitrfullum mönnum ok inn réttláti Loth var þröngdr af ranglátum mönnum, þá vakti upp óvin alls mannkyns freistni ok bruna meingörða alla vega í mót þeim guðs

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁰ *Vitæ Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 84.

riddara, sándi sundrþykki ok hatri milli bræðra ok frænda ok kærta vana, allt til floss at fyrirkoma honum ok ónýta hans kraptaverk, er þá tóku at vaxa með honum.¹⁴¹

Now, for that no man can be Abel, save he who tholes and proves the spite and envy of Cain; and as the holy Ezekiel dwelt with the venomous men, and the righteous Lot was hard pressed of wrongful men; so the foe of the whole human race waked up temptation, and the heat of persecution on all sides against this knight of God, sowing discord and hatred between brothers and kinsfolk and dear friends, all that he might hinder him, and make those wonders of none effect, which then began to grow with him.¹⁴²

Hákon and his henchmen are inspired by the devil in their treacherous and murderous dealings with Earl Magnús. His malign influence explains why Christians would turn violently against the saints, thus sidestepping the obvious political motives involved. But here the devil plays a still more crucial role. For a brief moment in time the immemorial battle between God and his adversary is fought in the shape of two historical figures, Hákon and Magnús, in an obscure location near the edge of the known world. With Magnús' death the devil is defeated and the people of the Northern Isles are baptised with his innocent blood. Similarly, in Aelnoth's work the killing of King Knud heralds Satan's demise and the true conversion of the Danish people to the Christian religion. As in Robert's text (see ch. 1.6.), historical figures are compared with biblical characters. Knud's father, Sven Estridssen is likened to David who in medieval tradition is often depicted as the symbolic forerunner of Christ (i.e. St Knud).¹⁴³ Just as in the Magnús corpus the enemies of the martyr are portrayed as henchmen of the devil, thus the people of Jutland who rebelled against the king are accused of acting as his accomplices.¹⁴⁴

Early last century Lauritz Weibull pointed out that Aelnoth perceives the history of the Danish kings through an Augustinian perspective. Their realm is presented as a battlefield between *civitas dei* and *civitas*

¹⁴¹ *MSL*, p. 354. The enemies of the Kievan martyrs Boris and Gleb and the Bohemian martyr Wenceslas, are also temporarily possessed by the devil when they plot and commit their foul deeds against the saints: "And then the devils summoned Boleslav and plotted fiendishly against Wenceslas". *Medieval Slavic Lives*, pp. 146–147. "But the straightway Satan entered his hear and incited him to commit greater and worse things and more murders". *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, p. 107.

¹⁴² *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 256.

¹⁴³ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 88. See, for instance, Steger 1961.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

diaboli. This schematic approach, adopted from well-known religious works, most importantly the seventh-century *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, attributed to the so-called Pseudo-Cyprianus, makes *Gesta Svenomagni* next to useless for the historian.¹⁴⁵ Weibull's interpretation has been criticised on the grounds that irrespective of the work's factual accuracy, it should be studied within the context of the ecclesiastical and political situation in Denmark at the time.¹⁴⁶ Still, it is worth emphasising that Aelnoth's presentation of history, in the terms highlighted by Lauritz Weibull, should be considered with the status of the English ecclesiastic in mind: that of an outsider in a relatively recently-converted land. In a similar way as the crucifixion of Christ heralded the triumph of God over the devil, thus Knud's martyrdom signifies the emergence of the Danish people from a barbarous, semi-pagan past to a new place alongside the Christian nations of Europe. In other words, although Aelnoth of Canterbury and *magister* Robert were influenced by English hagiographic tradition on princely saints, they were also innovative in their approach. Both portray the martyrdom of their respective subjects within the context of the inevitable triumph of Christianity over paganism, as well as a turning point in the history of the lands over which the saints had once ruled.

The device of placing the killing of a secular ruler within the context of a cosmic struggle between God and the devil was not confined to the Lives of the Scandinavian princely martyrs. This is precisely the interpretation that the early hagiographers of the Rus' saints Boris and Gleb (d. 1015) adopted.¹⁴⁷ More specifically, by applying biblical imagery their hagiographers projected "the notion of the Russian land as the newest participating member of Christendom, fully benefiting from Grace, and . . . [interpreted] the politically motivated assassinations of the princes Boris and Gleb as acts having spiritual ramifications for the newly Christianized nation".¹⁴⁸ The *Narrative, Passion and Encomium of Boris and Gleb* tells that the two martyrs "are

¹⁴⁵ Weibull 1915, pp. 75–90.

¹⁴⁶ In particular Breengaard 1982, pp. 122–149. *Idem*, 1986, pp. 9–20. Sørensen 1986, pp. 53–55. See Curt Weibull's reply to this criticism, Weibull 1986, pp. 4–7.

¹⁴⁷ Sciacca 1990, pp. 253–260. Cherniavsky 1969, pp. 7–10. Maczko 1975, pp. 68–80. Paul Hollingworth succinctly sums up this feature of Russian medieval hagiography: "the mimetic aspect of Rus' Christian culture, revealed so powerfully in its hagiography, was an expression of the desire of Rus' Christians to see themselves as part of God's unfolding salvific plan". *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, p. xxiv.

¹⁴⁸ Sciacca 1990, p. 260.

the defence and support of the land of Rus', the double-edged sword with which we lay low the insolence of the pagans and trample into the earth the arrogance of the Devil. Verily, can I say without doubt, that you are heavenly men and earthly angels, the pillars and the support of our land!"¹⁴⁹

Similar sentiments are also apparent in early hagiographical texts on St Wenceslas. The oldest Life of the Bohemian saint, the so-called *First Church Slavonic Life of Saint Wenceslas*, composed probably around the middle of the tenth century, is short and written in an unadorned style. Little attempt is made in this work to present the killing of Duke Wenceslas within a wider historical and salvific context.¹⁵⁰ However, in the *Second Slavonic Church Life of St Wenceslas*, written in the late tenth or early eleventh century, the saint's life and martyrdom is presented as a confirmation of the triumph of God and Christianity over the devil and paganism. The prologue informs that while "some nations, after long and circuitous wanderings, were brought to the rightness of the true way by holy illumination, nevertheless not all the nations of the world, even those predestined, partook of and received this gift of grace at the same time".¹⁵¹ The Bohemians are converted to Christianity but through Boleslav and his evil accomplices the devil attempts to deal the new religion a blow by murdering Wenceslas; Boleslav's assumption of power heralds "a reign of great injustice . . .".¹⁵² But in the larger context the saint's authority confirms the new religion in the hearts of the Bohemians and even converts those that still adhere to pagan idolatry.¹⁵³ In a still later work (mid thirteenth century), Wenceslas's martyrdom represents the final victory of Christianity over a pagan backlash inspired by the devil.¹⁵⁴ The "sun of the Christian religion had already

¹⁴⁹ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁰ *The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia*, pp. 61–65. For the dating of the Bohemian Lives (which, admittedly, is in some respects conjectural due mainly to the late preservation of the manuscript witnesses) see *ibid.*, pp. 24–25. Wood 2001, pp. 192–194.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁴ "Now in those times, when that truly Christian prince, who, like the rising sun, drove away the darkness of unbelief with the rays of his virtue, was guiding them according to the will of God, everything was going well for the Christians. However, seeing that his intrigues were being undone, the enemy of mankind, who from the very beginning of the world has attacked throngs of the faithful, took up arms the prince so as to scatter the sheep of the flock". *The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia*, p. 225.

risen over the land [i.e. Bohemia] of bleakness and uncultivated waste . . .". It was only through St Wenceslas that the "light diffused until it broke into broad day and began to shine for those who were living in darkness and in the shadow of death".¹⁵⁵

Master Robert and Aelnoth of Canterbury both present the martyrdom of a ruler as an integral part in the history of the earldom of Orkney and the kingdom of Denmark respectively. The different approach adopted by the unknown author of St Knud Lavard's second Life, *Vita altera*, composed not long after 1170, is therefore noteworthy. When compared to Aelnoth's work one is struck by the conspicuous narrowing of focus; unlike Aelnoth the author of *Vita altera* does not portray Knud's martyrdom as a climactic event in the struggle between Christianity and paganism, God and the devil. The emphasis is on Knud Lavard the ideal ruler and less on the manner in which he died.¹⁵⁶ His murder does not represent the turning point in the history of the Danish people. Indeed it is hard to avoid the thought that the author deliberately shied away from placing his saint on a similar grand cosmic stage as that erected by Aelnoth of Canterbury for the first Danish princely martyr. Stripped of this larger historical dimension it follows that the significance of the martyrdom itself is diminished. The spotlight is firmly on the saint as the exemplary ruler and the treacherous, albeit not satanically-inspired, nature of his betrayal. The inward-looking quality of the work undoubtedly reflects the nature of the occasion for which it was very likely composed: Knud Lavard's translation in 1170, an event which coincided with the crowning of King Valdemar's son (ch. 3.3). At that particular point in time there was less need to dwell on the emergence of the Danish people into the Christian world and more appropriate to concentrate on Knud Lavard's role as *rex iustus*, thus perhaps presenting the young heir with a royal model to emulate.

Master Robert's Life of St Magnús, the text which underlies the extant literary corpus on the saint, can be firmly placed within the context of the hagiographic corpus dedicated to the Scandinavian, and in indeed Central and East European, princely martyrs. His general approach to the subject is best likened to the one adopted

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹⁵⁶ "Den officielle passionslegende om Knud Hertug er altså ikke nogen helgenlegende i almindelig forstand, men snarere en kronike eller biografi af en *rex iustus*". Gad 1961, p. 165. "The official passion-legend of Duke Knud is not a saint's life in any usual sense, but rather a chronicle or a biography of a *rex iustus*". My own translation.

by Aelnoth of Canterbury in his *Gesta Svenomagni*; for both Englishmen the martyrdoms of their subjects represented the entry of relatively newly converted lands into the Christian fold.

1.6. *Robert's Vita and the Becket Corpus*

As we have seen, the hagiography on St Magnús of Orkney shows a clear family resemblance to other Lives of princely martyrs from England, Scandinavia and the Slavic lands. However, a direct influence from a particular work of this genre is impossible to establish. Although on a straight-forward plot-level the life and passion of the Orkney saint, as presented in both *OS* and *MSL*, closely correspond to the *Vita Altera* of St Knud Lavard, the absence of a direct textual parallel should make us wary of arguing for a link between them.¹⁵⁷ A more fruitful line of enquiry, however, appears when we compare the relics of *magister* Robert's Life with the earliest hagiographic corpus on the most prominent martyr-saint of the twelfth century: St Thomas Becket.¹⁵⁸

Benedict of Peterborough, in his *miracula* of St Thomas of Canterbury (completed 1171/72), tells that around the year 1160 a certain Robert of Cricklade, prior of the canons of St Frideswide's in Oxford, was travelling on foot between the Sicilian towns of Catania and Syracuse.¹⁵⁹ At one stage in his journey, as he was walking along a beach, a ferocious wave suddenly arose and hit his legs, with the result that "the flesh swelled immediately, and the skin was smitten with malignant redness". Following this incident Robert was plagued by an unidentified ailment in the years that followed. The doctors he consulted were unable to offer any relief for, they claimed, human hands could not heal the illness. But hearing of the manifold miracles performed by St Thomas Becket, Robert travelled to Canterbury where he visited the saint's tomb and bathed his infected limbs in the healing water of his well. From that moment onward his suffering grew more bearable until he fully recovered.

¹⁵⁷ The possibility of a direct influence has been suggested by Phelpstead 2006, p. 73.

¹⁵⁸ Substantial part of this chapter is based on Haki Antonsson 2004 C.

¹⁵⁹ *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, vol. II, ed. by J. C. Robertson. Rolls Series (London, 1876), pp. 97–101. My own translation.

Within a decade of the archbishop's death an extensive corpus had been composed on his life and martyrdom.¹⁶⁰ Robert of Cricklade was among the earliest biographers and in his testimony he reports that his cure had made him devoted to Thomas' sanctity; a devotion which Robert expressed by completing a *Vita et miracula* of the saint, probably c. 1173 and certainly not later than 1180. Although this composition has not survived in its original form, parts of it were incorporated into an Icelandic fourteenth-century compilation of various sources on Becket, the so-called *Thómas saga II*.¹⁶¹ Passages in this saga are attributed to a certain Robert of Cretel, identified by Eiríkur Magnússon, the Icelandic philologist, as the aforementioned Robert of Cricklade.¹⁶² E. Walberg, a pioneer in the study of the Becket corpus, pointed out that *Thómas saga II* was not the only relic of Robert's lost *vita*, for his work had also been used by Benet, a monk of St Albans, who around 1184 completed a verse Life of the saint in the Anglo-Norman vernacular. Walberg came to this conclusion by comparing Benet's poem with the passages attributed to Robert in *Thómas saga II*.¹⁶³ Additionally he demonstrated that the so-called D-fragment—four leaves of a codex written at the beginning of the fourteenth century—derives from Robert of Cricklade's work on the Canterbury saint. Lastly, Peter Foote has established that a text preserved in Stock. perg. fol. nr. 2, an Icelandic codex from the first half of the fifteenth century, stems from a translation of Robert's work into Icelandic.¹⁶⁴

Robert of Cricklade's date of birth is obscure, but it is known that he entered Cirencester abbey, Gloucester, as a young Augustinian

¹⁶⁰ On the Becket sources see Gransden 1986, pp. 1–9. Walberg 1929. *Idem* 1914, pp. 1–42. *The Lives of Thomas Becket*, pp. 1–11. Staunton 2006, pp. 1–18.

¹⁶¹ *Thómas saga erkibyskups. A Life of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Icelandic*, vol. I–II, ed. by Eiríkur Magnússon. Rolls Series (London, 1883).

¹⁶² *Thómas saga* vol. II, pp. xcii–xcv. For an overview of the Becket corpus in Old Norse, see Jakobsen 1993, pp. 643–644.

¹⁶³ Walberg 1915–17, pp. 407–426. Reprinted in Wallberg, *La tradition hagiographique*, pp. 9–33. *La Vie de Thomas Becket par Beneit. Poème Anglo-Normand du XII^e Siècle*, ed. by Börje Schlyter. Études romanes de Lund IV (1941). The D-fragment (drawn from the *vita*) is edited (along with the so-called E-fragment drawn from a *Gesta post martyrium*) in *Thómas saga* vol. II, pp. 251–284.

¹⁶⁴ Foote 1957–61, pp. 403–450. The Stock. fragment is edited in *Heilagra manna sögur. Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder efter gamle haandskrifter*, vol. II, ed. by C. R. Unger (Christiania, 1877), pp. 315–320. Foote, in the same article, also argued that the D–E fragments derived from a single version, most likely from the latter half of the thirteenth century, based on the translation of Robert of Cricklade's work (albeit supplemented with other material relating to Becket).

canon. There, according to his own words, he read widely in some of the more prominent authors of the period such as William of Malmesbury and Peter Lombard.¹⁶⁵ Around 1141 Robert became prior of the Augustinian house of St Frideswide's in Oxford where he supervised an impressive building programme which included a Romanesque church and cloister.¹⁶⁶ Gerald of Wales met Robert and described him "as being erudite in scriptural and other writings and not ignorant of the Hebrew language".¹⁶⁷ Robert's interest in this field is borne out by his attempt to obtain books from the Jews of Oxford which he believed contained a reference to Christ.¹⁶⁸ Gerald titles Robert as *magister*, in this period an ubiquitous term which simply denotes that he had acquired some sort of academic qualification.¹⁶⁹ Where Robert acquired his degree or precisely what learning lay behind it is impossible to gauge. Although he undoubtedly participated in the intellectual life in Oxford, he was not the first chancellor of its University as claimed in the old *Dictionary of National Biography*.¹⁷⁰

The unsatisfactory preservation of Robert of Cricklade's Latin Life is mirrored in the relative obscurity of his surviving compositions. Apart from the *Vita et miracula* of Becket it is known for certain that he wrote (or translated) four works: *Speculum fidei*; *De cunnubio patriarchae Jacobi*; *Homilies in Ezechielem* and *Deflorationes historiae naturalis*, a much condensed version of Pliny's Natural History.¹⁷¹ With the exception of the last named work, none of these compositions have been edited to date. Apart from the passages in *Thómas saga II* in which Robert is referred to by name, we have no direct knowledge of what sections of this bulky work derive from his *Vita*. Margaret Orme, however, undertook a detailed reconstruction of Robert's Life where she isolated the material which is particular to *Thómas saga II* and compared it with all the relevant twelfth-century biographical works on

¹⁶⁵ See Hunt 1936, pp. 31–33.

¹⁶⁶ Blair 1990, pp. 237–242.

¹⁶⁷ "cum esset vir litteratus et in scripturis eruditus et Hebraicae linguae quoque non ignoramus . . .". *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, vol. VIII, ed. by G. F. Warner. *De Principis Instructione Liber*. Rolls Series (London, 1891), p. 65. My own translation.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66. On this curious episode see Roth 1951, p. 121.

¹⁶⁹ Southern 1984, p. 11. Robert was the only prior of St Frideswide (not otherwise famed for scholarship) to bear this title Legge 1963, p. 250.

¹⁷⁰ Sub 'Robert of Cricklade', pp. 368–369.

¹⁷¹ Sharpe 1997, pp. 532–533. Callus 1963, p. 1338. Emden 1957, pp. 513–514. Mistretta 1967, p. 530. The *Incipits* of *De cunnubio patriarchae Jacobi* are printed in Stegmüller 1955, pp. 153–154.

Becket.¹⁷² By applying this method Orme could identify the sections that may stem from the Life.¹⁷³

Finnbogi Guðmundsson suggested that the Master Robert referred to in *MSL* is none other than Robert of Cricklade, the prior of St Frideswide's and the author of the lost Becket *Vita*. Finnbogi did not support his argument with a close examination of the relevant sources but found it sufficient for his purpose to mention a few parallels between *Thómas saga II* and the Magnús corpus in general, some of which had in fact been observed by A. B. Taylor in the introduction to his English translation of *OS*.¹⁷⁴ The two scholars noted the correspondence between the conduct of the two martyrs at the scene of execution, the description of their wounds, the bad fate of their enemies and the miracles which were said to have taken place at their shrines. These observations were not, however, supported by a textual comparison between the Robert of Cricklade material in *Thómas saga II* on the one hand (and other relevant material stemming from Robert's work) and the Master Robert's sections of *MSL*, supplemented by the short Latin Leg., on the other hand. Although Finnbogi's and Taylor's observations are certainly interesting, the parallels they mention are of such a general nature that they tell us little about a possible connection between the Magnús corpus and *Thómas saga II*. They certainly do not warrant an unqualified statement about Robert of Cricklade's authorship of the Magnús Life as the one that appears in a recent authoritative overview of medieval Icelandic literature.¹⁷⁵ If a relation between two works of this genre is to be established a "similarity of situation and an audible verbal echo . . ." must surely be the ideal criterion.¹⁷⁶ Only when a number of similarities and verbal echoes have been noted can we begin to assess the likelihood of a direct literary influence or even the possibility of a common authorship.

The philological pitfalls involved in comparing the works of two Roberts should not be underestimated. Most notably, we are dealing

¹⁷² Orme 1966, pp. 379–98.

¹⁷³ "Where T [i.e. *Thómas saga II*] has material which cannot be found in its extant sources and which has neither a later date of origin than 1174 nor signs of being an editorial addition, nor contradicts information in B [i.e. Benet] and Stock. 2, Robert will be tentatively presumed to be the source". *Ibid.*, pp. 383–384.

¹⁷⁴ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁵ Vésteinn Ólason (ed.) 1992, p. 457.

¹⁷⁶ *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford, 1987), p. lxvi.

with Lives that are incompletely preserved in Icelandic translations. It is generally assumed that Robert of Cricklade's *Vita* of Thomas Becket was translated into Icelandic c. 1200, probably by a clergyman by the name of Bergr Gunnsteinsson.¹⁷⁷ It was this translation, perhaps in a modified form, which was incorporated into *Thómas saga II* along with other material on the Canterbury saint. Stefán Karlsson has attributed the saga to Arngrímr Brandsson who wrote a Life of Bishop Guðmundr Arason of Hólar around the middle of the fourteenth century (1343 or later).¹⁷⁸ Stefán's solution is particularly attractive in light of the parallels that Arngrímr drew between the life of Bishop Guðmundr and Thomas of Canterbury.¹⁷⁹ Peter Hallberg on the other hand argued that Abbot Bergr Sökkason was responsible for the composition of *Thómas saga II* and, as mentioned earlier, *MSL*.¹⁸⁰ However that may be, it is clear that *MSL* and *Thómas saga II* are both works of fourteenth-century Icelandic hagiographers whose agenda was to make existing sources more in tune with prevailing religious concerns and stylistic trends.¹⁸¹

Apart from the obvious observation that both were considered saints soon after their deaths, Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, and Magnús Erlendsson, earl of Orkney, do not appear to have much in common at first sight. Whereas Thomas died as the incumbent of the second most important office in England and (at least from his perspective) in defence of ecclesiastical rights, Magnús' slaying simply represented a climax to a power struggle within the Orkney earldom. Likewise the locations of their deaths were worlds apart. Thomas was killed in Canterbury Cathedral, the centre of Christianity in the British Isles, whereas Magnús met his fate in Orkney which to many Englishmen must have seemed not far from northernmost edge of the world.

Following the introduction in *MSL* the Icelandic author quotes at length the prologue of Master Robert, in essence a scholarly exegesis on biblical terms associated with martyrdom (see pp. 64–65). Peter

¹⁷⁷ Foote 1961, pp. 442–444.

¹⁷⁸ Stefán Karlsson 1973, pp. 229–239.

¹⁷⁹ Ciklamini 1993, pp. 231–253.

¹⁸⁰ Hallberg 1968, pp. 144–151. *Idem* 1969, pp. 59–70.

¹⁸¹ See Sverrir Tómasson 1985, pp. 1009–1020. Thus one aim of the compiler of *Thómas saga II* was to “rid the text of anything that might be held to disparage saint or church or give credit to Thomas's enemies. In his work there are many signs of extensive revision of style and arrangement”. Foote 1961, p. 445.

Foote has drawn attention to the parallels between this preface and William of Canterbury's prologue to his *Passio et miracula* of St Thomas, written in 1173/1174.¹⁸² In both works the same passage from St Jerome's introduction to the Book of Samuel and the Book of Kings is quoted and commented on. Although Foote concedes that the authors could have made direct use of Jerome, he nevertheless finds it more plausible that Robert had William's *Vita* before him when he wrote about St Magnús. Either way it has been convincingly shown that when Robert of Cricklade wrote his Life of Becket he was influenced by William of Canterbury's *Passio et miracula*.¹⁸³

As one would expect Magnús' and Becket's early years are described in laudatory terms. Both are conscientious and obedient youths who, in contrast to their peers, find fulfilment in religious meditation and the perusing of holy writings.¹⁸⁴ It appears that Robert of Cricklade knew more about, or was perhaps more interested in, Thomas' youth than the other early biographers. For instance, he is the sole surviving authority on Becket's Parisian years and whereas other writers claim that he neglected his studies in this period, Robert stresses his diligence and tells that he did not participate in the rowdy student life of the city. In a passage peculiar to *Thómas saga II* we read that his youth was marked by the devotion he showed to the Virgin Mary:

ok hér í mót lagði honum jungfrú María svá bliðan hug, at þegar sem hann var í æskutíma kjöri hon hann sjálf til hins hæsta kennimanns, á nokkura líka mynd ok lesit er af hinum helga Davíð, at Guð Drottinn kjöri hann til konungs yfir Israels lýð, ok smurði hann fyrir hendr Samúelís þegar í barndómi, sem hann var smásveinn í sauðageymslu. . . .¹⁸⁵

and in return she set such a loving heart on him, that already when he was still in his youth she herself chose him to be the highest among teachers. This resembles in a way what is read of the holy David, that the Lord God chose him to be king over Israel, and anointed him by the hands of Samuel, even in his childhood, already when he was as yet but a little boy tending sheep.¹⁸⁶

This comparison of Becket to King David can be understood on at least two levels. Most clearly it refers to the archbishop's comparatively

¹⁸² Foote 1989, pp. 65–82.

¹⁸³ *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, p. lxix.

¹⁸⁴ *MSL*, pp. 338–339. On the childhood of Thomas in Robert's Life see Orme 1966, p. 384.

¹⁸⁵ *Thómas saga* vol. I, p. 18.

¹⁸⁶ This and subsequent translations of *Thómas saga II* are my own.

humble origin. In fact Thomas himself, when taunted for his lack of noble background, is quoted as writing to his bishops that the “holy David became from a shepherd the king of Israel . . .”.¹⁸⁷ In addition the words underline Thomas’ mission in life. Just as God chose to extend his grace to David and mark him out for kingship at an early age, thus Becket is designated for sainthood from birth. In *MSL* a similar thought is expressed in a passage deriving from Master Robert’s work: Joseph progressed from slave to counsellor and “the shepherd boy, David, the greatest king over all the tribes of Israel”.¹⁸⁸ The question must be left open whether the use of this particular biblical allusion by the two Roberts is coincidental or not.

A certain ambiguity can be detected in the portrayal of Becket and Magnús before they assume the role of archbishop and earl respectively. Concerning the latter we read, as earlier noted, that his early life was not altogether exemplary for he participated in viking-style raids and other activities that scarcely befitted a saint. Master Robert asks why God permitted “his servant to lust after robbery and murder, and to be defiled with such manifold sins and misdeeds?”¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the turning point for Magnús is close at hand. Having refused to raid England with the Norwegian king, and deserted the royal army, Magnús stays at the court of Malcolm III, the king of the Scots, and with “a certain bishop of Wales”:

Ok sem hann hafði verit slíka stund í hirð Skotakonungs sem honum líkaði, sæmðr af konunginum gjöfum ok göfgu föruneysi, fór hann á Katanes ok var þar af öllum virðulega tekinn, hirtr ok haldinn ok þegar kosinn ok tignaðr jarls nafni, vinsæll ok virðuligr öllum guðs vinum. Ok því næst án dvöl gerðist inn heilagi Magnús jarl Paulus af Saulo, predikari af manndrápsmanni, ok hefndi hann þat á sjálfum sér, þat er hann hafði illa lifat.¹⁹⁰

And when he had stayed as long in the Scot’s king court as pleased him, honoured with the King’s gifts and a noble retinue, he went to Caithness where he was well received, honoured and esteemed by all, and at once chosen and ennobled with the title of “Earl” beloved and honoured of all the friends of God. Thereafter, without delay, the holy Earl Magnús was made Paul out of Saul, a preacher from a manslayer, and he avenged on himself that which he had lived ill.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ “at af hjarðarsveini varð heilagur Davíð konungr Ísraels . . .”. *Ibid.*, p. 402.

¹⁸⁸ *MSL*, p. 374.

¹⁸⁹ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 247. “Hví leyfði allsvaldandi guð þenna sinn svein láta gírnast rán ok manndráp ok saurgast af svá margföldum syndum ok misverkum?” *MSL*, p. 344.

¹⁹⁰ *MSL*, p. 349.

¹⁹¹ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 251.

The key words here are “made Paul out of Saul” which express a sudden conversion from a life of warfare to one of Christian virtues and self-sacrifice, a conversion that coincides with Magnús’ acceptance of the title of earl from the people of Caithness. As already mentioned this passage is peculiar to *MSL* (see pp. 15–16).

Although biographers portrayed Thomas Becket before he became archbishop as a pious person, they could hardly ignore that up to that point he had lived the life of a layman. Indeed when Becket was chosen by Henry II for this important ecclesiastical office he had not even received priestly orders. Thomas’ military career was also an additional source of embarrassment. His behaviour was perhaps acceptable from a secular cleric (which he was),¹⁹² but from an archbishop, not to mention a canonized saint, it was clearly not. In *Thómas saga II*, Bishop Henry of Winchester addresses the following words to Becket as the latter hesitates to accept the archbishopric:

“Son minn sætasti,” sagði hann, “lát þér eigi hrygðar afla þetta efni, því at héðan í frá muntu fagrliga bæta, ef þú hefir nokkut brotið. Leið þér til minnis, hversu hann gerði Paulus, hann var fyrri mótsöðumaðr Guðs kristni, enn síðan mestr uppheldismaðr í orði ok eftirdæmi, ok dýrkaði hana at lyktum með sínu banablóði. Gefi þat Guð Drottinn, at þú líkist honum á götu lífs ok réttlætis.”¹⁹³

“My sweetest son”, he said, “let this matter not cause you any grief for from now on you will beautifully atone if you have in any way wronged. Call to your mind what he did, Paul who before had stood against God’s Christianity but later became her greatest supporter in both word and example and finally he glorified her his blood. May the Lord God grant that you be like him in the path of life and justice.”

It seems certain that this scene was included in Robert of Cricklade’s *Vita* of St Thomas for it is peculiar to *Thómas saga II*, the Stockholm fragment and, interestingly, Guernes’ verse Life of Becket completed in 1174.¹⁹⁴ A comparison of Henry’s speech with the reference to St Paul in *MSL* reveals parallels worthy of attention. Both passages

¹⁹² Barlow 1986, pp. 58–59.

¹⁹³ *Thómas saga* vol. I, pp. 80–82.

¹⁹⁴ Unger, *Heilagra manna sögur*, p. 318. *La vie de saint Thomas le martyr par Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence. Poème historique du XII^e siècle (1172–1174)*, ed. by E. Walberg. Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund 5 (Lund, 1922), lines 485–490. To my best knowledge the connection between the Lives of Guernes and Robert has not been fully explained. Guernes relied heavily on Edward Grim and he was also acquainted with William of Canterbury’s *Vita*. See Walberg 1929, pp. 92–134.

reflect Magnús' and Thomas' repentance of, and conversion from, the worldly life they had lived up to that point in time. Both saints, it is implied, will atone for their former sins by the martyrdom ahead and from this time onwards they excel in saintly virtues. The echo between the following sentences are worth observing: "*hefði hann þat á sjálfum sér, þat er hann hafði illa lifað . . .*", ("and he avenged on himself that which he had lived ill . . ."), says *MSL*, "*héðan í frá muntu fagrlega bæta ef þú hefur nokkut brotið . . .*", ("from now on you will beautifully atone if you have in any way wronged"), writes Robert of Cricklade. The reference to Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus may well be a medieval stock-formula applied in circumstances of this nature.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it is of interest that their transformations occur when Magnús and Becket assume the office of earl and archbishop respectively.

Like many saints of princely pedigree Earl Magnús is presented as a just ruler who expels pirates from his realm, supports the Christian religion, and rules his people with a strict but fair hand irrespective of their social status.¹⁹⁶ The same holds true for Becket in *Thómas saga II*: "*Enn höfðingjum ok stórmenni valdi hann opinberar gjafir. Af slíku, sem von var, unnu honum fátækir sem sínum feðr, enn höfðingar virðu hann sem sér jafnan, ok óttuðust hann sem sinn formann*".¹⁹⁷ *MSL* tells the following:

Hann var örr af fé ok ok stórgjöfull við höfðingja; hann veitti hversdagliga mikla hjálp fátækum mönnum fyrir guðs ást. Refsaði hann mjök herrán ok stuldi, lét drepa víkinga ok illgörðamenn, svá ríka sem fátæka. . . . Margir ágætir váru fleir hans mannkostir, er hann sýndi sjálfum guði, en leyndi mennina.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that the sudden conversion of Becket referred to by Bishop Henry is an anomaly in the Becket corpus. True, his biographers tend to portray his consecration in 1162 as a turning point but not, however, as a complete conversion from secular life to that of holiness. Rather it was "the dramatic realisation by divine will of a potential which had previously existed". Staunton 1998, p. 205. *Idem* 2006, pp. 76–96.

¹⁹⁶ See Foote 1988, p. 202.

¹⁹⁷ *Thómas saga* vol. I, p. 56. "But to lords and great men he gave official gifts. For these things, as might be expected, the poor loved him, as their father, but lords held him in honour as their equal, and feared him as their superior". See also Unger, *Heilagra manna sögur* II, p. 316 and Benet, *La Vie de Thomas Becket*, lines 181–86.

¹⁹⁸ *MSL*, pp. 352–53. The portrayal of the royal martyr as an ideal ruler can be traced at least back to Bede's description of King Oswine in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Gransden 1992, pp. 31–32.

He was generous of money, and open-handed to chiefs; he gave daily great money and help to poor men for God's love. He chastised much plunder and stealing, he let vikings and ill-doers be slain, as well powerful as poor. . . . Many and famous were his virtues which he showed to God himself but hid from men.¹⁹⁹

The last sentence brings to mind Robert of Cricklade's words on Becket's generosity towards the poor: "*Hér með lagði herra Thómas þá mildi til fátækra manna ok útlendra, at úspart huggaði hann fleira vesaldir með fjögjöfum, þótt þat væri leynt fyrir alþýðu*".²⁰⁰

General and particular similarities can be noted in the build up to the slayings in Canterbury Cathedral and on Egilsay. Both saints, for example, are slandered in the presence of their main adversaries, Hákon Pálsson and Henry II, and in both instances the vilification is instrumental in bringing about their violent death. In the case of Becket the theme of evil counselling figures prominently in a number of his Lives including, as we shall see, Robert of Cricklade's.²⁰¹

It has been suggested that Robert was sympathetic to King Henry's cause, in comparison at least to Becket's other early biographers.²⁰² For instance, it is known that he dedicated his translation of Pliny the Elder's work to the king. But such speculations must be modified in light of the following passage which appears in Robert's collection of homilies on Ezekiel, composed within a year of Becket's death:

Quid dicam de gloriosissimo martyre et pontifice Thoma, qui in nostris temporibus martirii coronam promeruit, qui regis minas non timuit nec temporalium honorum blandimentis cessit? Caritate enim Christi repletus omnia despexit et seipsum Christo pro libertate ecclesie hostium optulit.

What shall I say of Thomas, glorious bishop and martyr, who merited the crown of martyrdom in our time? He neither feared the king's threats nor yielded to the promise of worldly honour, but despised them all in the fullness of his Christian charity, and offered himself up as a sacrifice to Christ for the liberty of the Church.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 254.

²⁰⁰ *Thómas saga* vol. I, p. 54. "Unto this lord Thomas added such bounty to needy people and foreigners, that he provided them in their hardships with unstinted comfort in gifts of money, although this was hidden from the multitude".

²⁰¹ For instance the Life of Becket by William fitzStephen (1173/74). *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, vol. III, ed. by J. C. Craigie. Rolls Series (London, 1878), pp. 41–42.

²⁰² Foote 1961, p. 429.

²⁰³ Quoted from Smalley 1973, p. 198.

Judging from these words Robert of Cricklade supported the principles that Thomas Becket so strenuously championed. Still, Robert's attitude towards the king appears to have been somewhat ambivalent for, if we take *Thómas saga II* into consideration, it is evident that he did not perceive of Henry as Becket's only enemy or, for that matter, his most important one. Rather this honour fell to the prominent English ecclesiastics who failed to support the archbishop and deserted him in his hour of need. The following passage in *Thómas saga II* derives from Robert of Cricklade:

Ok er þat finna gamlir úvinir erkibyskups, draga þeir sig framm or skugganum, ok afklæða með öllu þá bölvaða öfund ok illgirni, er þeir höfðu lengi borit í sínu brjósti. . . . Sumir rægja hann fyrir eina saman ílsku sinnar úlýðsku. Má hér til nefna þrjá byskupa, er fremstir ganga, Rodgeirr af Jork, Gillibert af Lundúnum, ok Jocelin af Sarisber.²⁰⁴

Now that this comes to their attention the old enemies of the archbishop crawl out of the shadow, and uncover fully accursed envy and malice which they had long borne in their breast. . . . Some backbite him out of the mere wickedness of their evil nature. On this matter three bishops who were the most the prominent can be named here: Roger of York, Gilbert of London and Jocelin of Salisbury.²⁰⁵

In *MSL* slandering and sowing of ill will is very much in the foreground and here the culprits are Hákon's followers:

Tveir menn váru þeir með Hákon jarli, er til eru nefndir, at einna verst gengu á millum þeira frænda; hét annarr Sigurðr, en annarr Sighvatr sokki. . . . Margir váru þeir aðrir, er illan hlut áttu í þeim málum, ok váru þeir allir með Hákon, því at heilagr Magnús vildi enga rógsmenn halda í sinni hirð.²⁰⁶

Two men were they with earl Hacon who are named as having been the worst of all in going between those kinsmen; the one's name was Sigurd; and the other Sighvat sock. . . . There were many others who had a bad share in those matters, and these were all with Hacon, for saint Magnús would not keep any backbiters in his following.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ *Thómas saga* vol. I, p. 176. See also Benet, *La Vie de Thomas Becket*, pp. 418–420 and *Heilagra manna sögur* II, p. 319.

²⁰⁵ My translation.

²⁰⁶ *MSL*, p. 361.

²⁰⁷ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 261.

Although it is not clear whether this passage derives from Robert's Life, we know from *Leg.* that the theme of evil counselling featured in his work.²⁰⁸

Considering that Becket's and Magnús' saintly reputations rested to a large extent on the manner of their deaths, it is to be expected that their martyrdoms are described in considerable detail. The early Becket biographers tend to present slightly different accounts of what happened on the fateful day.²⁰⁹ The observation is also valid in relation to Magnús' martyrdom as it is presented in *OS* and *MSL*. *OS* tells that Hákon Pálsson arrives on Egilsay with an overwhelming force although the earls had agreed to bring only a small retinue. Magnús refuses to flee the danger in spite of being heavily outnumbered. The night before his death Magnús resides in a local church and requests mass to be sung. The following morning, when Hákon and his henchmen burst into the church, Magnús is not found but he shortly afterwards gives himself up voluntarily.²¹⁰ By leaving the church, a place of safe refuge, Earl Magnús' good will and trusting attitude are emphasised. Behind this description, one must assume, lies an early hagiographic account, i.e. **Vita*, on the passion of St Magnús.

If that was the case, Master Robert found it appropriate to change this description. In *MSL* Magnús stays put in the church and there, following morning mass, he is captured by Hákon's men. A particular note is made of the fact that Hákon and his companions desecrate the sanctuary of the church:

En Hákon jarl, er í þenna tíma var firrðr allri guðhræðslu ok ástsemd, svívirðandi privilegia kirkjunnar, óttaðist eigi inn at ganga í heilaga kirkju, raskandi svá frið hennar ok frelsi, at hann sýndi sinn glæp því grimmiligar sem hann framdi hann í helgara stað.²¹¹

But earl Hacon, who at that time was banished from all fear and love of God, dishonouring the privileges of the Church, was not afraid to go into the holy church violating thus her peace and freedom, so that

²⁰⁸ "*Satellites autem sui in necem beati Magni conspirantes, sed simulationis nube palliantes, cum beato viro pacifice in dolo locuti sunt ut beatus Magnus et Hako statuto die in quadam insula, quæ vocatur Egelesio, cum pari numero hominum et armorum convenirent*". *Leg.*, p. 306.

²⁰⁹ On the concept of the martyrdom in the early biographies of Becket see O'Reilly 1985, especially pp. 189–197. *Idem*, 1981, pp. 303–314. On the differing presentation of the martyrdom Staunton 2006, pp. 184–215.

²¹⁰ *OS*, p. 115.

²¹¹ *MSL*, p. 365.

he showed his wickedness all the more grimly that he did it in a holier place.²¹²

Magnús' arrest is presented here as a violation of ecclesiastical independence and privileges. Hákon is the transgressor who pays no heed to the sacrosanct domain of the church. This episode in *MSL* cannot fail to evoke the most symbolically charged violation of ecclesiastical sanctuary that the Christian world had witnessed to date: the killing of Thomas Becket before the altar of Canterbury Cathedral. Although this outburst of ecclesiastical outrage in *MSL* could possibly have been the work of the Icelandic author, it is established that Master Robert's work included a description of how the four servants of Hákon rushed into the church to capture Magnús.²¹³ Here, I would argue, *magister* Robert improved on a tradition relating to the execution of St Magnús, which was perhaps first recorded in the **Vita*, in order to make it confirm more closely to, or at least echo, the martyrdom of the Canterbury saint.

MSL describes the fearsome four in the following manner: "*Þessir fjórir, er heldr megu kallast af sínum grimmleik inir skæðustu vargar en skynsamir menn, jafnan þyrstandi til blóðs úthellingar, hlupu inn í kirkjuna mjök svá at lokinni messum*".²¹⁴ This bloodthirsty quartet recalls the four knights who plot against and eventually slay Thomas Becket. In point of fact the presentation of two of them in *Thómas saga II* echoes the reference to wild beasts in *MSL*. Thus Reginald fitzUrse is "*dýrum líkr í sínum grimmleik . . .*",²¹⁵ and Richard le Bret "*nú vorðinn verr enn skynlauss af skynsamri skepnu . . .*".²¹⁶ Later, at the scene of the murder, *Thómas saga II*, possibly following here Robert, refers to the knights' assault on Thomas as that of "*skæðir vargar á mildan hirði*".²¹⁷ As seen above the same words "*skæðir vargar*" are also applied to Hákon's henchmen. But considering that martyrs are traditionally likened to

²¹² *MSL* (Rolls Series), pp. 264–265.

²¹³ "*Irruentibus igitur in ecclesiam Domini apparitoribus . . .*". *Leg.*, p. 307.

²¹⁴ *MSL*, p. 366. "These four, who may rather be called for their cruelty the most harmful wolves than reasonable men, ever thirsting for the outshedding of blood, rushed into the church just about the end of the mass". *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 265.

²¹⁵ *Thómas saga* vol. I, pp. 514–516. "like beasts in his cruelty . . .".

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 515. "having now become from a rational being worse than an irrational one". I have not come across a direct parallel to this description in other Becket biographies.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 542. "the dangerous wolves on the gentle herd".

sacrificial lambs (a formula which ultimately derives from John 10: 3–4) it is not surprising that they are compared to “*vargar*” or “wolves”.

Another comparison, however, is more difficult to explain away in this fashion. Master Robert refers to Hákon’s underlings as “*sonum Belials, vándum illvirkjum, ok sonum ins dáliga Dohet, er æ og æ illt unnu, frá því er þeir fæddust af móðurkviði*”.²¹⁸ The reference to Belial is reasonably clear as the name is usually applied to those in the Bible “who behave in a dissolute manner, give false testimony, or hatch infamous plots”.²¹⁹ On the other hand the reference to Doeg (or Dohec), the trusted servant of King Saul, is less common, although in both Christian and Jewish tradition he was perceived as the archetypal slanderer.²²⁰ Interestingly, as the four knights plan their assault on the archbishop, William of Canterbury compares them to the sons of Belial and the adherents of Doeg.²²¹ In the so-called *Anonymous II* (or *Lambeth Anonymous*), a Life of Becket written in 1172/73 which in all likelihood was known to William of Canterbury, the same biblical reference is applied to the knights.²²² It is unlikely, although by no means impossible, that the mention of “Belial and Doeg” by Master Robert, William of Canterbury and the *Anonymous II* is a coincidence. Again the similarity of circumstances may have led the authors to refer to the same biblical characters. Still, in light of the relative obscurity of the reference, this solution appears somewhat farfetched. In this context a note should be made of Peter Foote’s suggestion mentioned earlier that Master Robert had been influenced by William of Canterbury’s Life of Becket.

²¹⁸ *MSL*, p. 358. “the sons of Belial, wicked ill-doers, and sons of the bad Dohet who from the day they were born from their mother’s womb did do evil”. *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 259. This comparison undoubtedly figured in the Latin Life for it also appears in *Leg.* “*Imminente vero die statuto inter eos, prædictus Hako cum septem vel octo navibus plenis, viris Belial et sanguinem sitientibus sibi associatis, prædictam insulam applicuit*”. *Leg.*, p. 306.

²¹⁹ Sub. ‘Belial’ in *Encyclopædia Judaica*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 419–420. See the biblical references provided there.

²²⁰ Ginzberg 1946, pp. 75–76. St Augustine referred to Doeg as a Judas-like figure who committed sacrilegious acts (most noticeably in his *Sermo ad populum*). See Dervos 1993, pp. 72–73. The *Íslensk fornrit* editor of the saga did not know what to make of this biblical name. *MSL*, p. 358. His identity was pointed out in Foote 1989, p. 75.

²²¹ “*Quo ruitis, viri Belial, haeredes Dohec?*” *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, vol. I, ed. by J. C. Robertson. Rolls Series (London, 1875), p. 132.

²²² *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, vol. IV, ed. by J. C. Robertson. Rolls Series (London, 1879), pp. 129–133. Here, however, the names do not appear together as they do in William of Canterbury’s and Master Robert’s works on Becket.

In addition it is recognised that William of Canterbury, *Anonymous II* and Robert of Cricklade made use of John of Salisbury's epistolary account of Thomas' martyrdom composed in 1171.²²³ All three were presumably also acquainted with John of Salisbury's well-known and widely circulated corpus of letters on the Becket conflict.²²⁴ Now, in a letter addressed to Becket that ominously foreshadows his martyrdom, John compares the archbishop to King David and Henry II to Saul. In another letter to Becket he likens those who attacked the rights of the English Church and were responsible for his exile to the slayer of the priests of Nob, i.e. Doeg (I Samuel 22: 11–13).²²⁵ In fact John of Salisbury applies the Doeg comparison more than once in relation to the ecclesiastics who failed to support the archbishop.²²⁶

It is also worth noting that elements of the story of Saul and David hover over the account of Hákon and Magnús as presented in *MSL* and *OS*. Most conspicuously, Hákon's envy of Magnús is echoed in Saul's attitude towards the popular and much loved David. Moreover, Hákon's meeting with a Swedish soothsayer in *OS* chapter 36 bears a certain resemblance to Saul's visit to the Witch of Endor.²²⁷ Both seek help from a divinator in order to have their political future foretold and, in the process, both break religious taboos.²²⁸ The reasons why they resort to this method are also comparable. Whereas Saul seeks out the Witch of Endor as a consequence of God's refusal to tell him what the future will bring, Hákon visits the soothsayer because St Ólafr does not deem him worthy of divinatory revelation. Given, however, the distinctively saga-like flavour of this particular episode, it is unlikely to have figured in Master Robert's Life.²²⁹ Nevertheless, a comparison between Saul and Hákon,

²²³ *The Letters of John of Salisbury* 2. *The Later Letters (1163–1180)*, ed. by W. J. Millor and C. N. L. Brooke. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1979), pp. 724–738. See the useful stemma in Barlow 1986, p. 5. Orme concludes that Robert of Cricklade relied heavily on John's letter in his description of the martyrdom. Orme 1966, p. 395. Staunton 2006, pp. 19–27.

²²⁴ For the historical background to these letters see Duggan 1984, pp. 427–438.

²²⁵ *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, p. 152.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 132 and 203.

²²⁷ *MSL*, pp. 341–344. I Samuel 28.

²²⁸ *Norges Gamle Love indtil 1387*, vol. I, ed. by R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (Christiania, 1849), pp. 351 and 389–390.

²²⁹ Foote 1988, p. 199. This episode in which the soothsayer foretells Hákon's future glory is a curious one. From my perspective it represents a highly conscious piece of literary composition where the author plays on established motifs relating to rulers who seek occult knowledge. In Oddr Snorrason's saga about Ólafr

on the one hand, and David and Magnús, on the other hand, is particularly appropriate in the light of the theme of envy which runs through the narrative: “He [i.e. Hákon] was very envious of the friendships and lordliness of saint Magnus; Hakon would willingly, with the greediness of his bad counsellors, hinder the honour of earl Magnus . . .”²³⁰

Implicit in John of Salisbury’s comparison of Becket to David is yet another set of identifications: that of Henry with Absalom and Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London, with Achitophel.²³¹ Indeed in Robert’s Life of Becket the same Gilbert is denounced for slandering the archbishop.²³² Achitophel and Husai are key figures in Absalom’s revolt against David, and they also make an appearance in *MSL*:

því gerðist svá, at jarlar sendu sín í meðal, með orðsendingu friðar ok sættar, ina hyggnuustu ráðgjafa sína, er réttlíga bera merking þeira Chusi [i.e. Husai] ok Achitophel, er báru sáttmál milli fleira Davíðs konungs ok Absalons, sonar hans, þá er þeir váru missáttir.²³³

For that, it so came about that the earls sent with messages between them for peace and atonement their most trusty counsellors, who rightly betoken Chusi [i.e. Husai] and Achitophel, who brought about the atonement between king David and Absalom his son when they had fallen out.²³⁴

Tryggvason, composed c. 1190, the missionary king also has his future foretold by a pagan Finn. In contrast to Hákon Pálsson, who goes out of his way to seek the soothsayer, King Ólafr is effectively forced by his retainers to attend the meeting. Moreover, in Oddr’s account the Finn recognises the spiritual superiority of the Christian king and in his presence his occult power begins to wane. In other words, the meeting between the two (which appears to be based on oral tradition) is turned into an *exemplum*, a symbolic display, of the dying world of paganism as it confronts Ólafr’s missionary efforts. *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København, 1932), pp. 66–70. On the other hand in the *OS* episode (which is also found in *MSL*) Hákon and the soothsayer meet on level terms: “But I [i.e. Hákon] have come to see thee, because I have been thinking that neither of us need [despise] the other because of his own virtues or religious beliefs”. *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 195. Haki Antonsson 2005 B.

²³⁰ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 257. “*Hann [i.e. Hákon] var mjök öfundsjúkr um vinsældir ok höfðingskap ins heilaga Magnúss; vildi Hákon gjarna með ágirni sinna illra ráðgjafa fyrirkoma sændum Magnúss jarls . . .*”. *MSL*, p. 356.

²³¹ Saltman 1984, pp. 343–348.

²³² On Foliot’s role in the Becket controversy see Knowles 1951, pp. 115–127.

²³³ *MSL*, p. 359.

²³⁴ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 259.

This passage is somewhat curious because in the Book of Samuel Achitophel and Husai are hardly involved in peace negotiations of any sort. On the contrary, Achitophel is the evil counsellor who plots the murder of David and he incites and encourages Absalom for that purpose. It is only due to Husai's cunning that his plan is thwarted. Surely Hákon must here be identified with Absalom, his henchmen with Achitophel, Magnús with David and his well meaning, albeit ineffectual, councillors with Husai. Against this background it is interesting to read in *MSL* that when Hákon heard of Magnús' return to the earldom he woke up "as a grim she-bear robbed of her cubs".²³⁵ The phrase echoes a passage in II Samuel 17: 8 where Husai tells Absalom that David will react against any attempt on his life as though he was a "bear robbed of her whelps in the field" (King James' version).

Saul and Absalom are not the only biblical tyrants that Robert found it appropriate to allude to in his portrayal of Earl Hákon Pálsson. The third one is the blasphemous and covetous King Ahab (I Kings 16–22). In *MSL* we read: "All sins come of covetousness, and all unlawful desires proceed from greediness. That was proved with Ahab the most wrongful king, who persecuted Elias [i.e. Elijah the prophet]. . . . The very same showed the traitor earl Hacon . . .".²³⁶ It is noteworthy that in a letter of 1166 John of Salisbury uses the same biblical comparison when he likens King Henry's persecution of Becket to Ahab's oppression of the prophet Elijah, who of course is represented by St Magnús in *MSL*.²³⁷

It is hard to escape the impression that Master Robert was influenced by the biblical allusions used by John of Salisbury in his writings on the Becket controversy. Hákon and Henry II are compared, directly or indirectly, to Saul, Absalom and Ahab, all rulers who persecuted or treated wrongfully the chosen vessels of God's grace: David and Elijah or, in other words, Becket and St Magnús. In addition Doeg is mentioned, the evil advisor who sows ill will and lays the groundwork for the final tragedy. In view of the many allusions Robert draws from these Old-Testament books it is therefore not surprising

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259. "*vaknaði sem grimm birna at hvelpum ræntum . . .*". *MSL*, p. 358.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260. "*Allar syndir gerast af girnd, ok allar fjstir óleyfðar af ágirni fram ganga. Þat reyndist með Achab, inum ranglátasta konungi, er ofsótti Heliam [i.e. Elijah] spámann. . . . Þetta it sama svikarinn Hákon jarl . . .*". *MSL*, p. 361.

²³⁷ *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, p. 247.

that he found it appropriate to use Jerome's preface to Samuel and the Book of Kings in the introduction to his work.

As Becket and Magnús face certain death they behave as though they were invited to a convivial gathering, Magnús to a feast and Thomas to a wedding.²³⁸ Again it must be acknowledged that cheerfulness of martyrs (particularly those of Late Antiquity) at their hour of death is a stock formula passions, and so is the wedding or feasting motif.²³⁹ Moreover, it is uncertain whether this motif came into *Thómas saga II* via Robert of Cricklade's work for it also appears in Edward Grim's Life of Becket completed in 1172.²⁴⁰ When Magnús receives the first blow from the executioner he "*fell þá allt til jarðar ok gaf sik guði í vald, færandi honum sjálfan sik í förn*".²⁴¹ After Thomas receives the second blow to his head *Thómas saga II* says: "*fellr erkibyskup framm á gólfrit með réttum líkama, svá fagrliga sem til bænar offrandi sik lifandi förn . . .*".²⁴² Again similar phrases are doubtless ubiquitous in ancient and medieval descriptions of martyrdoms. Still the verbal correspondence here (even if both are translations from Latin) is worthy of note.

Thómas saga II tells that three of the assassins did penance for their crime, but the fourth, William de Tracy, did not and in punishment he immediately suffered the wrath of God by contracting a horrible illness. A similar fate befell many of those who had supported the knights in their evil act.²⁴³ Interestingly, this description of godly

²³⁸ "*Hann var svá glaðr ok kátr, er þeir handtóku hann, sem honum væri til veizlu boðit*". *MSL*, p. 366. "He was as glad and merry when they laid hands on him as if he were bidden to a banquet . . .". *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 265. *Leg.*, p. 307. "*Hann hug-gar harmþrungna, ok gerist svá blíðr, sem þeir menn væru komnir, er honum byði til brullaups*". *Thómas saga* vol. I, p. 534. "He consoles the sorrowful and becomes so sweet as though the men had come to invite him to a wedding".

²³⁹ "and then, after duplicating in her own body all her children's sufferings, she hastened to rejoin them, rejoicing and glorying in her death as though she had been invited to a bridal banquet instead of being a victim of the beasts". The martyr is St Blandina of Lyon and the passage is from one of the earliest Christian *passio*. *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. by J. Musurillo (Oxford, 1972), p. 797. See also *ibid.*, 209 and O'Reilly 1985, p. 192.

²⁴⁰ "*tanquam ad nuptias illum invitaturi venissent*". *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket* vol. II, p. 433.

²⁴¹ *MSL*, 368. "Then he fell flat on the earth and gave himself over into God's power, bringing himself to Him as an offering". *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 267. "*Eductus ergo hilari mente et intrepido animo quasi ad epulas invitatus . . .*". *Leg.*, p. 204.

²⁴² *Thómas saga* vol. I, p. 544. "and at that blow the archbishop fell forward his body being stretched on the floor so beautifully as though offering himself in prayer as a living sacrifice".

²⁴³ *Thómas saga* vol. II, pp. 38–40.

wrath turning against the archbishop's enemies is peculiar to *Thómas saga II* and Margaret Orme considers Robert of Cricklade the most likely source.²⁴⁴ Likewise *MSL* (and *OS*) note the horrible fate that befell those who betrayed the Orkney martyr,²⁴⁵ although it is impossible to establish whether this section figured in Master Robert's work. King Henry II willingly undergoes a public humiliation after the killing of Becket while Earl Hákon Pálsson atones for his slaying of Magnús by undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome. Although both acts are undoubtedly historical facts the parallels are still intriguing.

André Vauchez, in his influential study of medieval sanctity, observed that in this period a distinctive form of sainthood prevailed in North-Western Europe. The overwhelming number of saints in Scandinavia, England and France were of noble stock: kings, princes, earls, bishops or abbots. In particular the princely martyr dominated the ranks of sainthood in England until the eleventh century and in Scandinavia into the thirteenth century. There was a notable shift in England from the veneration of royal saints to that of bishop saints; the turning point was the murder of Thomas Becket because with his death the popular and emotionally charged idea of the "innocent martyr" fused with the ideals of ecclesiastical independence. Here was an extremely potent blend and the biographers of the saintly bishops of the thirteenth and fourteenth century frequently applied the Becket model of sanctity for their purposes, even though the sacrifice of martyrdom rarely came into play.²⁴⁶ Thus the model of the "holy sufferer", intimately associated with the martyrdom of secular rulers, was applied to the murder of Thomas Becket. Looking beyond the question of authorship, it is perhaps this idea that in the final analysis connects the Latin Lives of St Magnús and St Thomas. The argument can be made that the outstanding feature of Robert's *Vita* of Magnús is the manner in which it supplements the hagiographic pattern associated with martyred rulers with elements derived from the early corpus on the Canterbury saint.

Other cases where the Becket corpus has influenced the hagiographic representation of princely martyrs can be mentioned. Thus in the 1170s the description of St Wigstan's martyrdom (d. 839) was apparently modified so as to conform to Thomas of Canterbury's

²⁴⁴ Orme 1966, p. 396.

²⁴⁵ *OS*, pp. 120–121. *MSL*, p. 372.

²⁴⁶ Vauchez 1997, pp. 167–173. For an Icelandic example see Ciklamini 1993.

death-scene.²⁴⁷ In the Scandinavian context, however, the case of the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* is particularly interesting. The textual history of this work is complex²⁴⁸ but for the present purpose it is sufficient to establish that it has survived in two versions, a shorter and a longer one. The oldest witness to the former text appears in a *Legenderium* from the Benedictine monastery of Anchin, dating to c. 1200 or even a bit earlier.²⁴⁹ The longer version is also preserved in a manuscript from the last decades of the twelfth century, Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 209, which originally belonged to Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire. The longer version was published by Frederick Metcalfe in 1881 and to date his edition serves as the standard one of the *Passio et miracula*. Much useful work has recently been done to establish the textual history of *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*.²⁵⁰ Less attention, however, has been paid to the actual hagiographic texts that may have influenced the *vita* (and *passio*) section of the work. In this respect the possible relevance of the Becket corpus should be addressed.

There is one aspect especially that suggest an influence from this corpus on the earliest Legend of St Ólafr.²⁵¹ This relates to the exile of the Norwegian king to Rus' which could be interpreted as sign of Ólafr's weakness in face of adversity. The author, however, is adamant to dispel any such notions:

Explicari uerbis non potest, quanta beneficia populis illis rex sepe nominatus contulerit, quantum profuit dum prefuit, et in promulgacione legum, et in sustentacione pauperum, et assiduitate predicationis, et exemplo sue sanctissime conuersationis. Set e conuerso perpressus est ab eis tribulaciones multas et malas, donec illorum multitudini resistere non ualens secesit in rusciam, oportunum ratus cedere tempori, donec uoluntati sue proposito tempus idoneum dominus conferre dignaretur. Nemeni ueniat in mentem fortissimum et constantissimum christi athletam, ut est infirmatis humane, cessisse perterritum metu passionis, qui sepenumero passioni sese sponte obiecerat, sicut rei exitus et ipsius

²⁴⁷ Hayward 1994, pp. 189–191.

²⁴⁸ For an overview of the debate on this issue see *The History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Ólafr*, tr. by Devra Kunin, ed. with an introd. and notes by Carl Phelpstead. Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series vol. XIII (London, 2001), pp. xxv–xlv. For an overview of recent research, see Mortensen 2002.

²⁴⁹ Mortensen 2000, pp. 165–189.

²⁵⁰ Ekrem 2000. Jørgensen 2000, pp. 157–169. Østrem 2000.

²⁵¹ For a more detailed discussion of this influence see Haki Antonsson 2004 A.

illustre martirium declaravit. Utilitati aliorum, oportuniori se reseravit tempori, quando fructus uberiores exhibere domino, et talentum sibi commissum multiplici resignare posset cum usura.²⁵²

Words cannot express the many benefits the oft-name king conferred upon his people, the good he did while governed them, by enacting laws and relieved the poor by diligent preaching and by the example of his holy life. He had many trials and tribulations to endure from the people, until at length he could not oppose the multitude of evils. Thinking the moment required it, he withdrew into Russia till the Lord should deign to find a time suitable for him to fulfil his desire and purpose. Let no one suppose that this most stalwart and steadfast champion of Christ was subject to human weakness, that he retreated for fear of martyrdom. For he had often courted martyrdom of his own free will, as the outcome of events and his illustrious death made manifest. For the benefit of others he saved himself to await a more favourable moment, when he might present more plentiful fruits to the Lord and return with manifold interest the talent entrusted to him.²⁵³

Far from representing an act of cowardice or constituting a neglect of royal duty, Ólafr's flight to Russia was a divinely inspired undertaking which, in the fullness of time, brought undoubted benefits to his subjects; the king fled so that in the end the full potential of his martyrdom would in be all the greater.

In 1164 Thomas Becket fled England, fearing Henry II's response to his stubborn stance in matters ecclesiastical, and he did not return to his archbishopric until 1170, the year of his martyrdom. Becket's critics within the Church portrayed his exile in a negative manner: the archbishop had left his flock unprotected and in disarray for the purpose of saving his own skin.²⁵⁴ Later Thomas's hagiographers presented a quite different point of view: he fled so that he might fulfil the inherent potential of his martyrdom. Far from being a sign of personal cowardice on Becket's behalf the exile was an essential prelude, or more accurately a pilgrimage, which culminated in the archbishop's martyrdom before the altar of his Cathedral.²⁵⁵ Thus William of Canterbury writes the following:

Fugit Thomas ne libertas ecclesiae periclitaretur; fugit ut probator et perfectior moreretur. Fugit, non ut mercenarius, qui videt lupum venientem et dimittit oves et fugit, quia non deerant qui ministerium sup-

²⁵² *Passio et Miracula*, p. 71.

²⁵³ *A History of Norway*, p. 30.

²⁵⁴ See Edward 1977, pp. 167–184.

²⁵⁵ See Staunton 2004.

plerent ecclesiastium, sed ut oves de longe tueretur quos sub lupinis faucibus tueri non poterat; fugit, non praelum sed a praelio. . . .²⁵⁶

Thomas fled to protect the Church's liberty from danger. He fled so that he could die more proven and perfect. He fled, not as a mercenary, who sees the wolf coming and flees, since those who could supply ecclesiastical ministry were not lacking, but in order to tend from afar the sheep whom he was unable to tend under the jaws of the wolf. He fled from the battle but did not flee the battle.

Like Thomas Becket, St Ólafr died for justice and equity.

It is recognised that Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson of Nidaros (1161–88) was in all likelihood responsible for the final version of the longer *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, although it has been debated to what extent he relied on older material in his account has been debated.²⁵⁷ However, the influence from the Becket corpus suggests that the *vita* section, at least, was written after 1170. Archbishop Eysteinn is the most obvious candidate for the authorship. After all he stayed (among other places) at Bury, St Edmunds, during his exile 1180–83 and it is known that he promoted the cult of the Canterbury martyr on his return to Norway.²⁵⁸ In addition, it has been speculated that Eysteinn, who oversaw the construction of Nidaros Cathedral, was influenced by architectural features in Canterbury Cathedral, not least Becket's shrine.²⁵⁹ Finally, it is not difficult to envisage how Archbishop Eysteinn could have easily identified with Becket's exile: he himself had been forced to flee his see because of King Sverrir Sigurðarson's rise to power.

* * *

Within a year of Becket's death Robert of Cricklade had composed his forty-two homilies on Ezekiel.²⁶⁰ Commenting on the prophet's vision of the "New Temple", the Oxford prior provides a brief

²⁵⁶ *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket* I, p. 41.

²⁵⁷ Mortensen 2002.

²⁵⁸ See Duggan 1982, p. 24. See the references there to *Libri Liturgici Provinciae Nidrosiensis Mediæ Aevi*. Vol. II: *Ordo Nidrosiensis Ecclesiae* (*Orðubók*), ed. by Lilli Gjerløw (Oslo, 1968), pp. 29–31.

²⁵⁹ Fischer 1965, pp. 127–132. See, however, the more skeptical approach in Danbolt 1997, pp. 91–97. On Eysteinn's exile see Duggan 2004.

²⁶⁰ The homilies are discussed in Smalley 1973, pp. 197–200. The homilies have not been edited but the biblical passages that Robert elaborates on (the first 38 homilies) have been collected by Schneyer 1974, pp. 171–177. The work is preserved in MS. Pembroke College Cambridge 30, fo. 145^a.

account, surely among the first written, of Becket's life and passion. On this occasion Robert's ambition was not to write a traditional *vita et passio* of the saint. Rather, he handled the material in the manner of a homilist who expounds Christian doctrine and virtues by the application of *exempla*. For instance, by his life of patience and steadfastness in face of worldly pressure, his celibacy and courage, Thomas Becket makes all of us blush with shame.²⁶¹ Robert's erudite style suggests that the work was aimed at a learned congregation, in all likelihood the resident scholars of Oxford. In this context it is worth observing the conspicuous sermon-like tone of Master Robert's sections in *MSL*. The life and martyrdom of St Magnús is used as a point of departure for moral and theological digressions. His celibacy, generosity, piety and ultimate self-sacrifice are the ideals that those reading or listening to the work should aspire to emulate:

Nú, mínir kærustu, rekum brott líkamligar fýstir, ok forðumst elsku óleyfðra hluta, sigrandi ok yfirstigandi árásir lastanna, en fylgjum fótsporum ok lífi þessa ins dýrðliga píslarváts með öllu megni várs hugskots, svá framalliga sem várr breyskleikr má bera. Fylgjum vegum lífs hans, höldum dæmum verka hans.²⁶²

Now, my dearest, let us cast away bodily lusts, and keep us from the love of unlawful things, conquering and rising above the attacks of blasphemy; but let us follow the footsteps and life of this the glorious martyr with all the strength of our minds, so far as our feebleness may bring us. Let us follow the ways of his life; let us hold to the pattern of his works.²⁶³

In a similar manner as Robert of Cricklade compares Thomas to a strong pillar supporting the Church in times of disarray, Master Robert presents Magnús as the expeller of Satan and heathendom from the Northern world and the one who “brings the tabernacle of almighty God”, the Christian religion and the Church, to the region.²⁶⁴ Both seem to have been fond of the Tabernacle metaphor for Master Robert (albeit via St Jerome) compares Magnús' self-sacrifice to the offerings brought into the Tabernacle whilst Robert of Cricklade likens the New Temple, which he emphasised was but another manifestation of the Tabernacle, to the temporal Church.²⁶⁵ Robert of

²⁶¹ Smalley 1973, p. 199.

²⁶² *MSL*, p. 371.

²⁶³ *MSL* (Rolls Series), pp. 269–270.

²⁶⁴ *MSL*, p. 370.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 370. Smalley 1973, pp. 197–200.

Cricklade contributed to the theological debate on the subject and he was familiar with Bede's *De tabernaculo*.²⁶⁶ The sermon-like style of Master Robert's presentation is borne out by such phrases as "*minir kærustu*" and "*inir kæru bræðr*", the latter a translation of "*fratres carissimi*", dearest brothers. This manner of addressing the reader is mainly, although not exclusively, associated with medieval sermons and homilies²⁶⁷ and Robert of Cricklade frequently made use of them in his exegesis on Ezekiel.²⁶⁸ The intended audience is clearly clerical and, moreover, the following passage suggests it consisted of the canons which served Kirkwall Cathedral.²⁶⁹

Í dag birtist oss, inir kæru bræðr, andlátsdagsr in sæla Magnúss jarls píslarvátts, hvíldardagr hans ok eilífs fagnaðar. Gleðjumst ok fögnum á þeim háleita degi, því at hann beiðist af oss hátíðlega góðfýsi ok einkanliga vegsemd, er byggjum hjá hans helgum dómi ok undir hans varnaði ok varðveizlu. . . .²⁷⁰

This day is revealed to us, dearest brethren, the death-day of the blessed earl Magnus the Martyr, his day of rest and everlasting bliss. Let us be glad and joyful on this high day, for that he craves solemn good-will and special honour of us, who dwell by his halidom and under his patronage and safe-keeping. . . .²⁷¹

It is beyond reasonable doubt that Master Robert was influenced by the early hagiographic and epistolary corpus on St Thomas Becket. In a somewhat tantalising fashion the fragmentarily preserved *Vita* of St Magnús by Master Robert leads us to a small and textually incestuous group of early authorities on Becket: William of Canterbury, Robert of Cricklade, *Anonymous II* and John of Salisbury. Although this conclusion does not prove that Master Robert of *MSL* and *magister*

²⁶⁶ Smalley 1984, p. 109. Robert of Cricklade maintained that the Tabernacle should be interpreted allegorically and not literally. This stance accords well with its application in Robert's Life of St Magnús.

²⁶⁷ For instance, *Gamla norsk homiliebok*: pp. 57, 14; 62, 21; 65, 5; 66, 22; 73, 6. The second numeral refers to the line-number. On this address in homilies see Amos 1993.

²⁶⁸ At the beginning of the following homilies: No. 3: "*oportet, fratres carissimi, textum litterarum subtilius intellegere . . .*". No. 17: "*Consideremus, fratres carissimi . . .*". No. 27: "*Continuam, fratres, expositionem exhibuimus . . .*". Schneyer 1974, pp. 171–177.

²⁶⁹ It should be noted that the first explicit reference to canons at Kirwall is from 1247. Crawford 2003, 147. The reference in *MSL*, however, is I believe evidence (if indeed any evidence is needed) for a cathedral chapter in the second half of the twelfth century.

²⁷⁰ *MSL*, 370.

²⁷¹ *MSL* (Rolls Series), p. 268.

Robert of Cricklade were one and the same person, the cumulative body of evidence certainly points strongly in that direction.

In this connection Robert's presence in Scotland in the 1160s should be considered. Finnbogi Guðmundsson noted Robert of Cricklade's journey to Scotland, where he shows up as a witness to a number of charters issued by King Malcolm IV.²⁷² The documents in which Robert's name appears have hitherto been dated between 1159 and 1165. It is possible, however, to date Robert's journey to Scotland with greater accuracy. Since the publication of the acts of Malcolm IV, G. W. S. Barrow has corrected some of his manuscript readings, including a charter issued at Perth where Robert of Cricklade now figures as a witness. The Perth charter was definitely issued in 1164 and therefore it is possible to establish that Robert stayed in Scotland during the winter of 1164–1165, presumably at the court of King Malcolm.²⁷³

Why the prior of St Frideswide's should take on this task in the first place is a question that must remain open. Although Robert of Cricklade can hardly be placed alongside professional hagiographers of this period such as Goscelin of Saint-Bertin or Henry of Avranches,²⁷⁴ his literary output in this genre was not confined to Becket. When Robert became prior of St Frideswide's a Life of the patron saint of the priory, the virgin St Frideswide (d. 727), was already in existence (composed 1100 × 1130).²⁷⁵ However, this work (Life A) was short and written in simple and somewhat unsophisticated Latin. Robert of Cricklade was almost certainly the one who undertook the task of re-writing this *vita*.²⁷⁶ Robert's work (Life B), which is almost twice

²⁷² *Orkneyinga saga*, pp. xlv–xlvii.

²⁷³ See the uncorrected document in *The Acts of Malcolm IV King of Scots, 1153–1165*. Collected and ed. by G. W. S. Barrow. *Regesta regum Scottorum 1153–1424*. Vol. I (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 274 (no. 260). For the corrected document see *The Acts of William I King of Scots 1165–1214*, ed. by G. W. S. Barrow, with the collaboration of W. W. Scott. *Regesta regum Scottorum*. Vol. II (Edinburgh, 1971), p. 118. For the possible relevance of this journey to Robert's authorship of the Magnús' *Vita* see Foote 1989, p. 74.

²⁷⁴ On hagiography in general in this period see, for instance, Bartlett 1995, pp. 37–53. There are examples from the twelfth century of English hagiographers composing saints' Lives for Scottish bishops. Thus Jocelin of Furness composed a Life of St Kentigern for his namesake, the bishop of Glasgow (1174–99), while the bishop of Whithorn commissioned Aelred of Rievaulx (1109–1167) to write a Life of St Ninian. Both Lives were re-workings of older ones. *Idem* 1999, pp. 81–82.

²⁷⁵ Edited by Blair 1982, pp. 93–101.

²⁷⁶ Edited in *ibid.*, pp. 103–116.

the length of Life A, is a “stylish literary re-working”²⁷⁷ that emphasises the moral lessons to be learned from the conduct of the virtuous virgin.²⁷⁸ As suggested, *magister* Robert approached the St Magnús material in a similar fashion. Indeed such “intellectualizing” of saints’ Lives is a notable feature of twelfth-century English hagiography. For example both Gerald of Wales²⁷⁹ and Osbert of Clare²⁸⁰ composed heavily digressive and exegetical *vitae* of King Æthelbert of Kent.

The question why Robert of Cricklade, prior of St Frideswide’s, should write a Life of St Magnús can not be answered with certainty.²⁸¹ A commission from the Orkney bishopric is one plausible, if unprovable, answer. The challenge of fitting the martyrdom of the Orkney saint within an intellectually acceptable framework may have appealed to him. Certainly the manner in which *magister* Robert places the martyrdom of the Orkney saint within a historical and salvific context while simultaneously alluding to the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, suggests that he took his task seriously. Beyond these general observations we are in danger of becoming lost in the realm of pure speculation. Still, it is evident that in the literary corpus on St Magnús of Orkney, perhaps more than in any of the Scandinavian Lives, various strands of hagiographic tradition come together: English tradition of writing about princely martyrs, the influence of the Becket corpus and, most notably, the desire, which is attested in other Lives of holy rulers from the European periphery, to place the martyrdom within a salvific, but concomitantly, a historical framework.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁷⁸ Like the Robert of *MSL*, Robert of Cricklade applies the sermon-derived phrase “*fratres karissimi*”. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁷⁹ Jones ‘Two Lives’, pp. 226–236.

²⁸⁰ For a brief description of this work see, *The Letters of Osbert of Clare. Prior of Winchester*, ed. by E. W. Williamson (Oxford, 1929), pp. 23–24.

²⁸¹ For background sketch of the ecclesiastical ties that may have induced Robert of Cricklade to write a Life of St Magnús, see Foote 1989, p. 76.

PART TWO

THE ORKNEY CONTEXT

2.1. *The Elevation at Birsay and the Translation to Kirkwall*

Our knowledge of the immediate events relating to the emergence of the cult of Earl Magnús of Orkney is almost entirely based on *Orkneyinga saga*.¹ In turn *OS* saga relies here on a *Translatio et miracula* which was presumably composed, but not necessarily along with the *Vita*, shortly after the translation of his bones to Kirkwall in 1136/1137. This section in *OS* and *MSS* begins with a miracle that involves Bergfinnr Skatason, a Shetlander, which leads into a description of how Bishop Vilhjálmr of Orkney was converted to the cause of Magnús' sanctity, elevated his remains at Birsay and finally translated them to Kirkwall.² The *MSL* account of the translation to Kirkwall is incomplete for there is a lacuna at this point in the principal manuscript witness, ÁM 350 4to.³

Considering the formulaic structure and the hagiographic commonplaces which distinguish a genre like *translatio et miracula*, it may seem a forlorn and not to mention hazardous undertaking to mine such literary specimens for historical information. However, it should be noted that it is precisely accounts of translations which are the most likely to preserve genuine historical information. Unlike saints' Lives proper the *translatio* is not occupied with reflecting eternal and thus necessarily imitative patterns of saintly conduct. Rather the *translatio* is for all intents and purposes concerned with describing a single event that took place in historical, and in our case relatively recent, time. Accordingly, there is scant reason to distrust our texts when it comes to the fundamental questions I am interested in: at what point in time was Magnús' sanctity first officially recognised and, more importantly, who was responsible for this development?

¹ There is no difference of any significance between the testimony of *MSS* and *OS* in this respect.

² *OS*, pp. 131–132. *MSS*, pp. 334–335.

³ *MSL*, pp. 374–375.

The accounts of the earliest stages in the development of Magnús cult follow a common pattern in *translatio* narratives:⁴

- Magnús' corpse is neglected.
- Removal of relics through the intercession of a women, perhaps here mirroring Joseph of Arimathea's role following Christ's crucifixion.
- A miraculous sign (a light above the grave and a sweet smell) testifies to Magnús' sanctity.
- Miracles of healing take place at Magnús' grave.
- The bishop (Vilhjálmr) is skeptical at first, but having received a heavenly sign he is convinced of Magnús' sanctity.
- The relics are elevated, tested by fire, and enshrined.
- Through a dream-vision the saint makes it known that he wants to be moved to another place (Kirkwall).
- The bishop, in the face of the ruler's (Earl Páll's) opposition, translates the shrine and instals it in a church.

This schema represents a progressively greater recognition of Magnús' sanctity: from neglect to the translation of his relics to Kirkwall, their final resting place. Crucial in this process are the healings that take place at his shrine. The first cure is that of the aforementioned Bergfinnr Skatason, a blind man from Shetland who has his sight restored at Magnús' resting place. This marks the beginning of conversion of the general populace to earl's sanctity. The second breakthrough in the cult's recognition occurs when Bishop Vilhjálmr is cured of a temporary blindness which had been inflicted on him as punishment for doubting the saint's authenticity.

As mentioned, *OS* tells that after pleading by Magnús' mother, Hákon allowed the corporal remains of the murdered earl to be buried at Birsay. Earlier Hákon is said to have refused to grant him burial in a church.⁵ It is known that a church was situated on Egilsay, the isle was in fact an episcopal residence,⁶ and thus it may not simply have been the wish to bury Magnús in hallowed ground that lay behind the decision to have his corporal remains moved to Birsay. Christ Church had been built there by Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson around the middle of the eleventh century and in his reign it became the main residence of both the bishop and earl. Þorfinnr himself is

⁴ See, for example, Heinzelmänn 1979, pp. 52–66. On *translatio*—the retrieval of relics and their enshrinement—as a genre in Danish hagiography (mostly translated from Latin) see Gad 1961, p. 126.

⁵ *OS*, p. 119.

⁶ Radford 1982, p. 27.

said to have been buried at the church,⁷ as one would expect in the case of its founder. In any event, the burial of a ruler in an important town or ecclesiastical centre served as a symbolic manifestation of his stature.⁸ For instance, following Earl Rögnvaldr Kali's death in 1158/59 his body was transported, with some ceremony, from Caithness to St Magnus Cathedral, the cathedral which he had founded some two decades earlier.⁹

OS tells that Magnús' sanctity was first revealed by a "heavenly fragrance" near the grave and a column of light appearing over it.¹⁰ Following these miraculous portents *OS* tells the following:

Þvi næst gerðu menn ferð sina, bæði af Orcneyjum ok Hialtlandi, þeir er vanheilir varo, ok vauctu at leiði ins helga Magnus iarls, ok toko bot sinna meina; enn þo þorðu menn eigi þessu upp at hallda meðan Hacon iarl lifði.¹¹

... men who were sick made pilgrimages—both from the Orkneys and Shetland—and they kept vigil at the grave of Saint Magnus the Earl, and were cured of their diseases. But yet men did not dare spread this abroad while Earl Hakon was alive.¹²

Hákon Pálsson died c. 1123 and his sons, Páll and Haraldr, succeeded him. The latter, however, died shortly afterwards. Like his father Páll is said to have taken a similar negative stance towards Earl Magnús' sanctity. It is also told, as earlier noted, that Vilhjálmr, the bishop of Orkney at the time, showed scepticism and indifference towards rumours relating to the same matter.¹³ The state of the cult

⁷ *OS*, p. 87.

⁸ A case in point is the Icelandic poem *Norégs konunga-tal*, composed c. 1200 at Oddi, in which the burial places of the Norwegian kings from Haraldr hárfagri to Magnús Erlingsson (d. 1184) are noted. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning 800–1200 A*, bind I–II, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København, 1912–1915), A I, pp. 579–589. See also the elaborate description in *Morkinskinna* of the translation of King Magnús góði's body from Denmark (in 1047) and its burial in Trondheim. *Morkinskinna*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København, 1928–1932), pp. 145–148.

⁹ *OS*, pp. 315–316.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹² *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 212.

¹³ "Hann [i.e. Bishop Vilhjálmr] tortrygði lengi heilagleik Magnus jarls". *Ibid.*, p. 121. "Vilhjálmr byskup drap ok mioc i egg því, er menn saugðu frá iartinum Magnus iarls, ok kallaði aftru micla at fara með slíct". *Ibid.*, 131. "For a long time he disbelieved in the sanctity of Earl Magnus". *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 213. "Bishop William also took much of the edge off what men said about Earl Magnus' miracles and declared it heresy to go about with such tales". *Ibid.*, p. 219.

in the period between Magnús' death in (probably) 1117 and the official recognition of his sanctity in 1135 is impossible to reconstruct in any detail (for these two dates see pp. 77–78). The miracles are not particularly helpful in this respect for the majority of them occur after the *translatio* to Kirkwall and are thus in a sense advertisements for the corporal relics already enshrined at that location. Still, it is likely that in the absence of a relic-centred cult, places which had been especially associated with Magnús' reign became important in enhancing and reminding people of his sanctity. For instance, a place-name in Shetland bears his name.¹⁴ In addition, a hint of the decentralised nature of the cult in its earliest stages is indicated when *OS* tells that before Magnús' grave at Birsay became a place of pilgrimage "men began often to call on him if they stood in any danger, and immediately the prayers were answered which they made".¹⁵

OS thus gives the impression that the initial stage in the development of Magnús' cult was marked by a spontaneous belief in his sanctity. Of course this could be a hagiographic *topos* that ascribes a prominent role to the general population in the recognition of the earl's sanctity. But the fact that named individuals from Shetland are mentioned in relation to the miracles, as well as the clear opposition of the earl and bishop to the cult, supports the notion its origins were indeed popular. The question why this devotion appeared in the first place is difficult to assess and on this issue the saga is not very helpful. It has been suggested that Magnús' involvement in clearing out pirates and raiders from Shetland explains to some extent his posthumous popularity in this part of the earldom.¹⁶ *OS* tells that in tandem with Hákon he rid Shetland of a particularly unpopular pirate in Burra Firth. This event was at least of sufficient significance to have been commemorated in a (now lost) poem on Hákon and Magnús.¹⁷ Further, it is of interest that Shetlanders feature in the

¹⁴ Crawford 1984, pp. 75–79. However, the dating of this place-name is uncertain.

¹⁵ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 212. "*Síþan toku menn at heita a hann opt, ef i haska varo staddir, ok greiddiz þegar þeira mal, sem þeir beiddu*". *OS*, p. 120. It has been argued that shortly after Magnús' martyrdom a church was built and dedicated to him on Egilsay. The primary function of this church "was to mark one of the sites associated with the martyrdom . . .". Fernie 1988, p. 159. Cant 1993, pp. 117–119. For an interesting study of how cults could flourish in the absence of official recognition, patronage and hagiographic writing, see Smith 1990, pp. 309–43.

¹⁶ Crawford 1984, pp. 77–79.

¹⁷ *OS*, p. 111. It is not clear whether this is the same poem as the one composed

majority of the miracles where the origin of the people involved is noted and, moreover, there are more church dedications of St Magnús on Shetland than Orkney.¹⁸ Thus the only recorded miracle that occurred before the *elevatio* feature Shetlanders who kept vigil at Magnús' grave.¹⁹ The high profile of Shetlanders in the early stages of the cult undoubtedly reflects the fact that Shetland was a part of Magnús' half of the earldom.

According to *OS* the first earl to support the cult of St Magnús was Rögnvaldr Kolsson, the son of Kolr Sæbjarnarson, a chieftain from Agðir in south-western Norway, and Gunnhildur, the martyr's

about Hákon (see ch. 1.1.). The wording "*kæde því, er ort er um þa . . .*", suggests that the author of *OS* was familiar with another lost poem that dealt with the joint reign of Magnús and Hákon.

¹⁸ It is evident that the three versions of St Magnús' miracles are versions of a lost collection. Each collection contains material—both whole miracles and incidental details—which do not appear in the other versions. Altogether there are twenty-four miracles attributed to Magnús in *OS*, *MSL* and *MSS*. Of these two take place at his grave at Birsay, seventeen at his shrine in Kirkwall, one in Iceland, one in Norway, one in England and two at unspecified locations. Two features regarding the Magnús miracles are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, the prominence of Shetlanders is conspicuous. Of the eighteen miracles where the place of origin of the people from the earldom is noted, sixteen involve people from Shetland whereas only three from Orkney and one from Caithness (one miracle involves two men from both regions) are cured. Moreover, the same Shetland farmer, Bergfinnr Skatason, plays a role in five miracles both before and after the translation of Magnús' remains to Kirkwall. Secondly, eight miracles involve the cure of madness and devil possession. The rest include the cure of leprosy, paralysis, blindness and other ailments. The ratio of mental disturbance is noticeably high compared, for instance, with the miracles attributed to St Ólafr of Norway. Of the ten healing miracles narrated by Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla* not a single one involves the curing of madness or possession. See Whaley 1985, pp. 1083–1103, esp. pp. 1084–1085. Of the forty-five or so miracle accounts recorded in the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* only two involve cure of a mental illness. *Passio et miracula*, pp. 80–92, 106–107. Of the 176 miracles attributed to the Icelandic saints, St Þorlákr, St Jón Ögmundarson and Guðmundr Arason (not canonized) only twelve involve cures of this kind. Whaley 1994, p. 856. In the miracle collections of St Þorlákr of Iceland only one account deals with possession or mental illness. Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson 1994 B, p. 2. That St Magnús was particularly associated with healing madness and devil possession (the two of course were closely related in this period) is further supported by the Icelandic *Árna saga byskups* of the early fourteenth century. The saga tells of an Icelandic priest who was cured of devil possession when he called upon Magnús in a church in the Faroe Islands that was dedicated to the saint. *Árna saga byskups*, pp. 183–184. According to Krötzl "*Geisteskrankheiten*" amount to 12% of the recorded healing-miracles from Scandinavia in the period from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Krötzl 1994, p. 188. Haki 2006, pp. 50–54. For the church dedications (five in Shetland and three or four in Orkney) see Soiland 2004, pp. 173–174. Cant 1975. See also map on p. 229.

¹⁹ *OS*, pp. 131–132.

sister. In 1129 King Sigurðr Magnússon of Norway (1103–1130) bestowed the title of earl on Rögnvaldr along with the share of the earldom which had previously belonged to Magnús.²⁰ For reasons OS fails to elaborate on, Rögnvaldr did not immediately claim his inheritance. But in 1135 King Haraldr gilli of Norway confirmed the grant,²¹ and in the spring of the same year Rögnvaldr sent envoys to the Northern Islands and Caithness in order to test his support in the region and negotiate with the reigning earl, Páll Hákonarson.²² The messengers carried back Páll's predictable refusal to hand over half of the earldom. Next summer Rögnvaldr arrived in Shetland with his followers but on this occasion he was outwitted by Earl Páll and returned to Norway.

The saga first associates Rögnvaldr with St Magnús' cult in 1137 at a war-council he held in Norway, shortly before his second expedition to the earldom and after the *elevatio* of his uncle. At this meeting his father is said to have advised him to call on Magnús to aid and protect him in the campaign ahead (see ch. 5.2).²³ In the spring of 1137 Rögnvaldr arrived again in the earldom and secured for himself Shetland and the North Isles of Orkney. Through the mediation of the Orkney bishop a temporary truce was agreed and Rögnvaldr set up camp on mainland Orkney while Páll went to Rousay. However, the impending showdown between the two earls never materialised. Earl Páll was captured by Sveinn Ásleifarson, a powerful local magnate, and shipped to Scotland. This marked the end of Páll's reign and in the late summer of 1137 Earl Rögnvaldr Kali had assumed sole rulership in the Earldom of Orkney. In the same year, or at least not long afterwards, he commenced the building of St Magnus Cathedral.

There is scant reason to mistrust the saga when it presents Vilhjálmr, the bishop of the earldom, as the figure who effectively sanctioned the cult of St Magnús. As noted, he is said to have been less than enthusiastic about the earl's saintly reputation to begin with. When miracles were reported and pilgrims began to assemble at the martyr's grave, he "took much of the edge off what men said about Earl Magnus' miracles and declared it heresy to go about with such tales".²⁴

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 157–159.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 176–177.

²⁴ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 254. "Vilhjálmr byskup drap ok mioc i egg því, er menn saugðu frá iarteinum Magnus iarls, ok kallapi aftrú micla at fara með slícu". OS, p. 131.

Vilhjálmr's opposition did not cease with Hákon's death (c. 1123) and the succession of Páll. One summer, however, the bishop is returning home from Norway when storm forces him to stay in Shetland and he vows that if the weather abated he will not stand against the canonization of Earl Magnús. The bishop then travels safely to Kirkwall but fails to keep his promise and as a punishment for his oath-breaking he is struck blind. Finally though his sight is restored at Magnús' grave and after this "the Bishop summoned to him all the men of highest rank in the Orkneys, and made it known to them that he was now going to search the grave of Earl Magnus".²⁵

Ok er til var grafit, var kistan up komin or iorþu. Let byskup þa þva beinunum ok varo allvel lit; hann let fla taka einn kaugul ok reynir i vigþum elldi þrysvar, ok brann eigi, helldr varþ hann alitz sem gull. Þat er sumra manna saugn, at hann væri þa runninn i kross. Þar urðu þa margar iartegnir at helgum domi Magnus iarls. Var þa licaminn i skrin lagþr ok sett yfir altari; þat var Luciumessudag; þa hafði hann i moldu legit I vetr ok XX. Var þa i laug tekit at hallda hvarntveggia daginn, upptaukudaginn ok anndlazdaginn. Heilagr domr Magnus iarls var þar varþveittr neccvara hrifl.²⁶

And when the grave was opened, the coffin was taken up from the earth [more correct translation: "the coffin had come up from the earth" (i.e. of its own accord)]. The bishop then had the bones washed, and they were very clean and bright. Then he had a knucklebone taken and tried it thrice in hallowed fire, and it burned not, but rather did shine like gold. Some men say that it ran into the form of a cross. In this place there were many miracles through the holy relics of Earl Magnus. That was on Saint Lucia's Day; he had then lain in the earth twenty-one years. Then the custom was established that each day should be hallowed—the day that he was taken up and the day of his death. The holy relics of Earl Magnus were kept there for some time.²⁷

This *translatio* account in *OS* thus takes the form of a kind of dialogue between Vilhjám and the saint in which the bishop responds appropriately to the supernatural signs directed to him.²⁸

²⁵ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 220. "Eptir þat heimti byskup at ser alla ina gaufguztu menn i Orkneyjum, ok gerði þa bert fyrir þeim, at hann villdi þa leita til leiðis Magnus iarls". *OS*, p. 133.

²⁶ *OS*, p. 133.

²⁷ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 220.

²⁸ A variation of the "reluctant bishop" *topos* appears in the early thirteenth-century Danish hagiography on St Theodgarus (St Thøgar), who allegedly died in the 1060s, entitled *De Sancto Theodgaro*. Shortly after the death of Theodgarus a priest sees a heavenly light shining over his grave. Encouraged by the local population in his effort to have the sanctity of Theodgarus recognised, the priest secures the

Scholars have found much to explain in these chapters. Thus early last century Dietrichson attempted to “translate this legendary language into historical language”.²⁹ He suggested that Vilhjálmr had met Rögnvaldr (or his father) in Norway and realised that the pendulum of power was swinging in the earl’s direction and that his future and that of his bishopric no longer lay with Páll’s cause. In the opinion of Dietrichson, Vilhjálmr’s miraculous conversion was entirely political in nature. Eminent historians of medieval Orkney, such as Hugh Marwick, have concurred with this hypothesis.³⁰ W. P. L. Thomson went a step further and speculated that prior to Rögnvaldr’s second expedition to Orkney, the earl sent Vilhjálmr a message which carried “secret terms . . . sufficiently attractive to send him hurrying off to Norway”.³¹ Presumably this included a promise to commence the construction of St Magnús Cathedral.

It is, admittedly, tempting to interpret the episcopal canonization of Magnús as the outcome of a plot between Bishop Vilhjálmr and Earl Rögnvaldr. The fact that Vilhjálmr kept his office after the change of power and even accompanied Rögnvaldr on his famous pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the early 1150s, suggests that the two were on good terms. But it must be stressed that the saga does nowhere hint at co-operation between the bishop and the earl in this matter. Although the silence of the source does not rule out this possibility, it is nevertheless essential to look closer at the chain of events before any generalisation can be put forward.

Unfortunately the chronology regarding the *elevatio* of Magnús and the subsequent translation of his relics to Kirkwall is far from clear, mainly because the section that tells of these events is less than ideally integrated into the main narrative of *OS*.³² Consequently the

consent of the pope and on October 30, 1067, his bones are elevated and placed on the altar. However Ulfricus, the local bishop, and King Sven Estridssen refuse to believe in his holiness. The king orders Ulfricus to defrock the said priest which the bishop does but, in addition, he submits Theodgarus’ relics to an elaborate trial by fire. When the bones are retrieved unscathed from the fire the bishop finally acknowledges Theodgarus’s sanctity. Ulfricus tells the king about what had happened and he is also won over. *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 14–16. Further on Theodgarus and his cult see Haki Antonsson A, pp. 74–77.

²⁹ Dietrichson and Meyer 1906, pp. 25–26.

³⁰ “one is disposed to conclude that Rögnvald and Kol had been active in collusion with William ever since the latter’s visit to Norway . . .”. Marwick 1951, p. 63.

³¹ Thomson 1987, p. 61.

³² Bishop Vilhjálmr is thus twice introduced to the story and his scepticism regarding Magnús’ sanctity is mentioned twice in a very similar manner, first in chapter 52 and later in chapter 56. *OS*, p. 121, *ibid.*, pp. 130–31.

involvement of Bishop Vilhjálmr is presented more or less in a historical vacuum. No date, for instance, is provided at the point when he embarks on his journey to Norway, we are simply told that it “happened one summer that Bishop William sailed east to Norway . . .”.³³ Moreover, the saga does not indicate how much time lapsed between the elevation and the translation. About one aspect *OS* is nevertheless explicit: Vilhjálmr elevated Magnús in the reign of Páll Hákonarson for the saga states that the bishop “promised that he would take up the holy relics of Earl Magnus whether Earl Paul liked it well or ill . . .”.³⁴ From the saga it is clear that Páll was still in power when the relics were moved from Birsay to Kirkwall. The earl is indeed said to have been present when Bishop Vilhjálmr announced that they were to be transported to a new site.³⁵ If this piece of information is believed (and there appears to be no reason why it should not be) the *elevatio* and *translatio* could, in theory, have taken place at any time during Páll’s reign, that is between c. 1123 and 1137.

OS states that when Bishop Vilhjálmr elevated his bones, Magnús “had lain in the earth twenty-one winters”.³⁶ Still, this does not solve the conundrum of dating Magnús’ elevation, for the precise date of his death is also not clear.³⁷ The dates presented in *OS*, (1091), and *MSL*, (1104), are clearly of no help in this respect.³⁸ However, Magnús Már Lárusson, in a detailed study of all the relevant sources relating to this problem, came to the conclusion that the likeliest date for Magnús’ death is 1117, although he acknowledges 1116 as a possible alternative.³⁹ The year 1115 is out of the reckoning because April 16th of that year fell on Good Friday. *OS* tells that Magnús was killed after Easter and, in any case, martyrdom on such a holy day would undoubtedly have left a trace in the hagiographic corpus. Thus although 1116 cannot be discounted altogether, 1117 seems

³³ *The Orkneyinga Saga*, p. 219. “*Þat var eit sumar, at Viljalmr byskup fór austr til Noregs . . .*”. *OS*, p. 132.

³⁴ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 220. “*ok het því, at hann skyldi upp taka helgan dom Magnus iarls, hvar er þat lícaflí Pali iarli vel æþa illa . . .*”. *OS*, p. 133.

³⁵ *OS*, p. 134.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133. *MSS* mentions twenty winters. *MSS*, p. 326.

³⁷ Thus, *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopaedia*, Paul Bibire gives the date as “probably 1117” (p. 401) while in the same work Henry Kratz has it taking place in 1115 (p. 563). Another well-known handbook, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, has it 1116. Farmer 1997, p. 322.

³⁸ *OS*, p. 119. *MSL*, pp. 369, 371.

³⁹ Magnús Már Lárusson 1963, pp. 492–497.

the more likely year. Both *MSL* and in the liturgical material mention that Magnús was killed on a Monday (*feria secunda*) and in the year 1117, April 16th fell on a Monday.

Magnús Már Lárusson's contribution does not solve the problem of dating the elevation for if the statements of *OS* and *MSS* are followed we come up with the years 1137 and 1138 respectively for this event. As noted earlier *OS* tells that Páll was still in power when the translation to Kirkwall took place. St Magnús was elevated on the 13th of December, the feast of St Lucy, and in that month in 1137 Rögnvaldr had already been the sole ruler of the earldom for some months and Earl Páll had been taken into custody. If this is correct, the elevation of St Magnús took place prior to 1137 and the statements of *OS* and *MSS* on the dating of this event cannot be trusted.

December 13th, 1135, appears the most probable date for the *elevation* of Magnús. Political events in Norway earlier in that year provide a plausible background for Bishop Vilhjálmr's undertaking. In January 1135 King Haraldr gilli of Norway captured and effectively dethroned his co-ruler King Magnús Sigurðarson. The shift in the balance of power in Norway was undoubtedly of considerable interest to Vilhjálmr as his position depended to a large extent on Norwegian support (see ch. 2.3.). Hence for the bishop it must have been a matter of some urgency to secure his standing with Haraldr gilli. In the spring of 1135 the king confirmed Rögnvaldr's claim to the earldom⁴⁰ and, as earlier observed, it was in the summer-time that saga tells Vilhjálmr set for Norway,⁴¹ ostensibly to meet up with Rögnvaldr and Kolr. Vilhjálmr's elevation of Magnús' bones later in the year fits well into this political context. Becoming aware of Haraldr's support for Rögnvaldr he may well have taken this course of action in order to distance himself from Earl Páll. Indeed the saga indicates that relations between Vilhjálmr and Páll were not at their best in the early months of 1136.⁴² Nevertheless the bishop, as

⁴⁰ Rögnvaldr was on Haraldr's side in the Norwegian power-struggle. *OS*, pp. 154–156. The dating is different from the one given by Taylor in his translation of *OS. The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 235. However, *OS* is clear on the matter that Haraldr made his statement in the spring following the battle of Fyrileiv (early August 1134).

⁴¹ *OS*, p. 159. Rögnvaldr left for the Orkneys in the middle of the summer.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 172–174. The bishop had helped in the escape of a murderer whom Earl Páll had attempted to apprehend.

noted, acted in 1137 as mediator between Rögnvaldr and Páll.⁴³ If he had been openly supporting either faction at that time he would surely not have been cast in this particular role. Thus, in my estimation, Vilhjálmr returned from the visit to Norway in the autumn or winter of 1135 and elevated Magnús' relics on December 13th in the same year. *OS* says that the relics of St Magnús had been kept in Birsay for "some time."⁴⁴ Then a certain Gunni from Vestray came to Birsay with the message that Magnús had appeared to him in a dream and demanded to be translated to Kirkwall. Bishop Vilhjálmr ignored Earl Páll's less than enthusiastic response and transported the shrine to Kirkwall where it was placed in a church that was in all likelihood dedicated to St Ólafr of Norway.⁴⁵ As Páll was still in Birsay when this occurred the *translatio* must be dated before the truce agreed between him and Rögnvaldr in the spring of 1137.

This is what *OS* tells about the *elevatio* and *translatio* of Earl Magnús. Although the details of the saga account can of course not be trusted in the absence of corroborative evidence, the overall picture is still relatively clear. When Rögnvaldr Kali finally assumed sole rulership, the cult of his uncle had already been placed on an organised footing by the bishop of the earldom. This is the single historical historical fact that can be safely deduced from the saga material. So far an attempt has only been made to place the immediate events relating to the official recognition of Magnús' saintly status within a plausible chronological framework. But it is evident that there were deeper, more fundamental, reasons behind the recognition of the cult by the ecclesiastical and the secular authorities in Orkney.

2.2. *The Earl*

The cult of St Ólafr Haraldsson of Norway undoubtedly served to some extent as a model for Earl Rögnvaldr when he commenced the building of St Magnus Cathedral in 1137 or shortly thereafter, thus associating his authority with the memory of his uncle.⁴⁶ By the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–85.

⁴⁴ "*neccvara hriþ*". *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁵ Dietrichson and Meyer 1906, pp. 74–76.

⁴⁶ St Ólafr was a popular saint in the Orkney earldom in the medieval period. Thus in Shetland alone nine churches are known to have been dedicated to the

first half of the twelfth century Ólafr Haraldsson had emerged as the patron saint of a kingdom which was ruled by the saint's dynasty. In 1134 King Haraldr gilli allegedly vowed that if St Ólafr would aid him in his struggle against King Magnús blindi, he would erect a church in honour of the saint in Bergen.⁴⁷ About two years later Kolr, Earl Rögnvaldr's father, is said to have encouraged his son to build a cathedral in Kirkwall and dedicate it to his murdered uncle if the saint brought him victory over his rival, Earl Páll.⁴⁸ Although the veracity of the two scenes cannot be attested, the similarities between them are still noteworthy. At the height of his power-struggle with Earl Páll the saga tells that Rögnvaldr spoke the following words to his supporters:

Þat hygg ek, ef gud vill, at ek fái ríki í Orkneyjum, at hann myni gefa mér styrk til ok inn helgi Magnus iarl, frændi minn, at halda því, þott þer farit heim til eigna ydvarra.⁴⁹

If God will that I gain the realms in the Orkneys, methinks He must surely give me strength for the task, and so will Saint Magnus the Earl, my kinsman, to hold it [and defend it], although you sail home to your own lands.⁵⁰

Although it would be naive to take this passage at face value as a proof of Rögnvaldr's attitude towards the cult of St Magnús, it would be equally misguided to dismiss out of hand the sentiments behind it. At the very least it can be deduced that at the time *OS* was written there was a tradition in place which linked Rögnvaldr's political ambition with the saintly reputation of his kinsman.

Prior to Rögnvaldr's take-over of the earldom in 1137 he had never been in permanent residence in the Northern Isles. Thus the Orcadians and the Shetlanders probably considered him somewhat of an outsider, at least in comparison with his opponent Earl Páll Hákonarson.

Norwegian saint. In comparison, only five are known to have been dedicated to St Magnús. See Cant 1975, pp. 47–50.

⁴⁷ *Heimskringla* III, p. 286.

⁴⁸ *OS*, p. 159. The possible influence that Rögnvaldr's father may have had on the emergence of St Magnús' cult should not be underestimated. Kolr is said to have been well-connected within the Norwegian royal retinue. For instance, he followed King Magnús Ólafsson on his expedition to the British Isles (1098). *OS* mentions that Kolr was close to the king. *OS*, pp. 100–103.

⁴⁹ *OS*, p. 186.

⁵⁰ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 254.

As his power-struggle with Páll was to a considerable extent a competition for support among the populace, he clearly needed to identify himself with the history of the people over whom he aspired to rule. In this respect it is worth noting that when in 1129 Rögnvaldr received the title of earl from King Sigurðr, the Norwegian ruler had him change his name from Kali, to Rögnvaldr, thus evoking the reign of his famous predecessor Earl Rögnvaldr Brúsason.⁵¹ A certain parallel to such name-changing can be found in *Sverris saga* where Sverrir Sigurðarson, the outsider *par excellence* of Norwegian medieval history, adopts early in his career the name of Magnús (after King Magnús góði) when St Ólafr advises him to do so in a dream-vision.⁵² Just as Rögnvaldr created a point of contact with the inhabitants of Orkney by associating himself with the illustrious Rögnvaldr Brúsason, thus Sverrir assumed the name Magnús in order to identify himself with the fondly remembered King Magnús góði, the son of St Ólafr Haraldsson. This considered, the testimony of *OS* that Earl Rögnvaldr saw and presented his cause as being hallowed by the supernatural authority of his saintly uncle should not be dismissed out of hand.

Barbara E. Crawford has noted that the history of the Northern Isles in the tenth and the eleventh centuries “was dominated by the rivalry over the earldom lands and possessions between the two Earldom lines, descendants of Paul and Erlend Thorfinnsson”.⁵³ Furthermore she has argued that the cult of St Magnús was supported by Rögnvaldr so as to make the claim of his line to power more secure. Shetlanders, in particular, were supportive of Rögnvaldr in his confrontation with Earl Páll. Shetland formed a part of Magnús’ half of the earldom and its inhabitants were, as the miracle accounts indicate, the most fervent believers in his sanctity. The suggestion has even been made that an “active propaganda industry was at work [in Shetland] . . . on Rögnvald’s behalf”.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *OS*, p. 154.

⁵² *Sverris Saga*, p. 4. Note, however, that Saxo Grammaticus claims that Sverrir adopted the name in order to identify himself with his (alleged) great-grandfather, King Magnús berfætr. Saxo Grammaticus, *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia*. Books X–XVI. The texts of the first edition with translation and commentary in three volumes by Eric Christiansen. Vol I: Books XIV, XV and XVI. Text and translation, tables and maps. British Archaeological Report (International Series) 118 (1) 1981, XIV, liii, pp. 548–549.

⁵³ Crawford 1984, p. 67.

⁵⁴ Thomson 1987, p. 61.

From the emergence of the Orkney earldom in the ninth century the earls recognized the nominal overlordship of the Norwegian kings. But the extent of Norwegian involvement in Orcadian affairs was essentially dependent on the ambition of the incumbent king. Hence during the peaceful reign of Ólafr kyrri (1066–1093), Páll and Erlendr were left to their own devices. In contrast, when the unruly Magnús berfættr (1093–1103) embarked on his military campaigns to the British Isles, he unceremoniously deposed the two brothers and put his own young son in their place. The main source of friction within the earldom itself was the question of power-sharing between the male members of the ruling house. Although we are largely reliant on *OS* regarding this issue it is nevertheless clear that no fixed procedure of succession was in place. Any male of the dynasty could stake his claim for power; success depended on the ability to muster support among the leading men of the earldom and/or secure support or recognition from the kings of Norway and Scotland. One method of limiting inter-dynastic feud and accommodating different claimants was to divide the dominion between them. But this arrangement was inherently unstable for the death of an incumbent earl, or the appearance of a new candidate on the scene, could all too easily upset the equilibrium of power.⁵⁵

As noted earlier, Páll and Erlendr took over the earldom c. 1065 following the death of their father, Þorfinnr Sigurðarson, and to begin with they ruled it jointly instead of dividing the land between them. This arrangement did not last and, as a result of the ambition of their sons, the earldom was divided like it had been in the reign of Þorfinnr and Brúsi. The termination of the joint rulership of Páll and Erlendr marked a turning point in the history of the ruling dynasty of Orkney for it was from this point onwards that we see the emergence of the two rival lines—the Erlendr-line and the Páll-line—who were to compete for power throughout the twelfth century. And it could be argued that the habit of dividing the earldom between the two branches strengthened their notion of separate identities. In light of this dynastic background the hypothesis that Rögnvaldr promoted the cult of St Magnús in order to legitimise his own claim to power and, by the same token provide the Erlendr-line of the dynasty with an edge over its rivals, is particularly tempting.

⁵⁵ A case in point is the division of the earldom between the four sons of Earl Sigurðr Hlöðvisson following his death in the battle of Clontarf in 1014. *OS*, p. 23.

Gábor Klaniczay has observed that in Anglo-Saxon England, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe princely cults were used not only to legitimise

... the claim of a certain branch of the ruling dynasty to retain power with the support of the cults they patronized, but, in fact [they] also contributed to the institutionalization of the new royal power. They constituted an intermediary phase between rulership bound to the innate virtues of a certain dynasty (constantly giving rise to rivalries between the pretenders) and the more stable hereditary order, where one lineage could assert its supremacy.⁵⁶

There are some notable similarities between the ruling house in Orkney in the twelfth century and the princely dynasties of the relatively newly converted peripheral lands of Christian Europe in the same period, such as Kievan Rus', Hungary, Bohemia and Denmark. There, as in Orkney, succession to rulership was ill-defined and extended to all male members of the princely house without any clear-cut hereditary order either being followed or recognised. In situations of this kind there was a marked tendency for the ruling house to split into different branches with all the destabilising affects which that entailed. A key concept in Klaniczay's passage is the notion of an "intermediary phase". In one sense the promotion of princely cults by rulers in the less politically advanced lands of Christian Europe represented a way of legitimizing power, one that pre-dated the introduction of primogeniture or the introduction of the paraphernalia of "institutionalised" Christian rulership, such as coronation and unction. Still, although a dynastic cult could bestow lustre and prestige to the ruler and his office, it was an ineffectual way of narrowing the power-base to a single line of the dominant dynasty. In this context it can be pointed out that in one exceptional case all these factors—the establishment of a princely cult, the "institutionalization" of royal power and the monopolization of authority by one scion of the ruling house—came together. At the Ringsted assembly in 1170, King Valdemar I of Denmark had his son crowned (thus introducing both coronation and the concept of primogeniture) and the corporal relics of his father, Duke Knud Lavard, translated. This event effectively put a formal seal on a *de facto* situation: the exclusion of the competing Niels-line of the royal dynasty from power (see ch. 3.3).

⁵⁶ Klaniczay 1990, p. 86.

The saga tradition and the political context in the earldom of Orkney both support the hypothesis that Earl Rögnvaldr commenced the building of St Magnus Cathedral and promoted the cult of Magnús in order to strengthen his own rule at the expense of the Páll-line of the dynasty. However, it is important to distinguish between Rögnvaldr's intentions on the one hand and the subsequent development of the cult on the other hand; as will become clear in the course of this study, cults of this type developed in tune with changing political and ecclesiastical circumstances.

In 1138 Earl Rögnvaldr was effectively forced to hand over half of the earldom to Haraldr Maddaðarson, the grand-son of Hákon Pálsson, and following Rögnvaldr's death in 1158/59, Haraldr became the sole ruler of the earldom, a position which he held (admittedly with some difficulty) until his own death in 1206. It was precisely in the reign of Haraldr that significant progress was made in the construction of St Magnus Cathedral. In the 1180s work on "a new crossing, enlarged transept chapels and a greatly extended eastern limb were started virtually simultaneously . . .".⁵⁷ Although the bishop may have overseen the building of the Cathedral, it was certainly the earl, in conjunction with the people under his rule, that provided the funds necessary for the project. Thus in the long run the identification of the cult of St Magnús with one particular scion of the Orkney ruling house was not to last, not surprisingly perhaps because neither did the split within the dynasty. In this respect the cult was not unique in medieval Europe. There are a number of cases where kings and princes, who had assumed power at the expense of rival kinsmen, promoted the cults of their deceased ancestors or relatives in order to bolster their own precarious rule. Such were the motives behind King Ladislaus' canonization of King Stephen of Hungary in 1083,⁵⁸ and Grand-Duke Jaroslav's of Kievan Rus' promotion of the cult of his half-brothers, Boris and Gleb (see ch. 3.1). But with time the more narrow political and dynastic origins of these cults faded, and St Stephan and the Rus' princes emerged as the patron saints of their respective lands. This also appears to hold true in relation to the cult of St Magnús.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Fawcett 1988, p. 97.

⁵⁸ Klaniczay 1994, pp. 352–353.

⁵⁹ One can only assume that contemporaries noted the similarities between the cults of St Magnús and St Ólafr. As St Ólafr was seen as the ultimate overlord of

2.3. *The Bishop*

As in the other Nordic lands the eleventh and the early twelfth centuries were of pivotal importance in the development of the Church in the Northern Isles.⁶⁰ Christianity was of course not new to the region. There is evidence that as early as the seventh century the Celtic population of Orkney and Shetland had adopted the religion. Furthermore it cannot be ruled out that Christianity survived in some shape or form even after the coming of the Norsemen. In any event it is generally acknowledged that the Norse settlers were turning to Christianity in the first half of the tenth century.⁶¹ Around 1180 the Norwegian Theodoricus monachus wrote that King Ólafr Tryggvason of Norway had forced Earl Sigurðr Hlöðvisson of Orkney to accept Christianity (c. 995).⁶² Whatever truth lies behind this story it certainly appears that around the turn of the millennium the Orkney earls were converted and that not long thereafter they began to take an active interest in the organisation of religious life. In the context of this study it is the position of the highest ecclesiastical authority in the earldom—the bishop—that is of primary importance.

In its general outline the episcopal development in the Northern Isles was similar to what we encounter in the other Scandinavian lands. An establishment of a territorially defined diocese followed an

the Norwegian kings, thus St Magnús hallowed the authority of the Orkney earls. Not only did the ambitious scope of St Magnus Cathedral testify to the material wealth of the earls, but it also projected to the outside world that they considered themselves on a par with other rulers of medieval Christendom. Against this background it is not difficult to envisage how the cult of St Magnús could have developed into a focal point for Orcadian opposition against Norwegian hegemony. In this context one only has to think of the cult of St Wenceslas which helped to sharpen the political identity of the Bohemians in relation to their more powerful neighbours. Graus 1975, pp. 159–179. There is no evidence that the cult of St Magnús was exploited in the often-turbulent dealings between the Orcadian earls and their Norwegian overlords. The Norwegian kings, at least, had no qualms about seeking supernatural aid from the saint. In 1263 King Hákon Hákonarson embarked on a military expedition to restore Norwegian control over parts of the kingdom which had come under Scottish rule. The mission proved ineffective and on his return he wintered in Orkney. During his stay he fell ill and, according to the contemporary *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, he pleaded to the Orkney saint (unsuccessfully one may add) to restore his health. *Flateyjarbók* II, p. 302.

⁶⁰ See for instance, Sawyer 1988, pp. 36–46.

⁶¹ For an overview of the christianisation process in Orkney and Shetland see, for example, Barrett 2004 and Cant 1984 A, pp. 2–5.

⁶² *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae*, pp. 16–17. This tradition is also recorded in *OS*, p. 22.

initial period of non-resident or missionary bishops.⁶³ In this respect the Orkney earldom can be likened to Iceland where the General Assembly (Alþingi) formally accepted Christianity in the year 999/1000. Missionary bishops were then active in the country until the establishment of the first bishopric in 1055/56. Lists of the early bishops consecrated for Orkney have not survived. Although the episcopal lists of the archbishopric of Nidaros include Orcadian bishops, the earliest mentioned is Bishop Vilhjálmr who assumed office in the first decade of the twelfth century.⁶⁴ As a result we are heavily dependant on Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, written 1072 × 1085, regarding the ecclesiastical situation in Orkney prior to Bishop Vilhjálmr.⁶⁵ Book four of this work mentions a certain Henricus who became the first bishop of Lund around 1060 at the behest of King Sven Estridssen of Denmark.⁶⁶ According to Adam, this Henricus had previously been a bishop in Orkney and the keeper of King Canute's treasury in England. Thus he came to the Northern Isles before the string of bishops dispatched there (or at least consecrated to Orkney) by Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen sometime between 1043 and 1072.

At the end of his third book Adam names the bishops whom Adalbert consecrated for work in the northern lands: nine for Denmark, six for Sweden and two for Norway. Besides he appointed "a cer-

⁶³ See Andersen 1988, pp. 57–60.

⁶⁴ Kolsrud 1913 A, pp. 374–375. For the bishops' lists, see *ibid.*, pp. 247–255. *Idem* 1913 B, pp. 293–308. Cowan 1989, pp. 25–36. Crawford 1996, pp. 1–14. De Geer 1985, pp. 77–88.

⁶⁵ *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. by Bernhard Schmeidler. *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum Ex Monumentis Germaniae Historicae Seperatim Editi* (Hannover and Leipzig, 1917).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, viii, pp. 235–236. Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, composed 1122 × 1133, tells that a certain Heinrekr stayed two years in Iceland and he is mentioned in *Hungvaka*, a brief ecclesiastical history of Iceland written in the first half of the thirteenth century, as one of the bishops who visited Iceland during the episcopacy of Ísleifr Gizurarsonar (1055/56–1080). *Íslendingabók—Landnámabók*. Fyrri hluti. Íslensk fornrit 1, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson (Reykjavík, 1968), p. 18. *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek* 11: *Kristni saga, Þátr Þorvalds ens víðförla, Þátr Ísleifs biskups Gizurarsonar, Hungvaka*, ed. by B. Kahle (Halle: Niemeyer, 1905), p. 95. Oluf Kolsrud suggested that this Heinrekr is the same person as the Henricus mentioned by Adam of Bremen. Kolsrud 1913 B, p. 294. The fact that Adam does not link Henricus with Hamburg-Bremen and considering his English and Danish connections it seems likely that he was sent on the initiative of the archbishopric of York. The dating of his (presumably brief) visit to Orkney cannot be established with any certainty. Kolsrud suggests c. 1050 while D. E. R. Watt proposes a date sometime around 1035. *Ibid.*, p. 294. Watt 1969, p. 247.

tain Turolf to the Orkneys. Thither also he sent John, who had been consecrated in Scotland, and a certain other who bore his name, Adalbert".⁶⁷ These bishops were missionary legates whom Adalbert exhorted with counsel and reward "to preach the word of God to the barbarians".⁶⁸ Adalbert strove to enhance the influence of his metropolitan see in the North and for that purpose, for instance, he dispatched bishops to Iceland to preach in the decades prior to the establishment of the bishopric of Skálholt.⁶⁹ Adalbert's aim was to transform the archbishopric into a patriarchate that would oversee the ecclesiastical affairs of both northern Germany and the newly christian Scandinavia. Although Adalbert was unable to fulfill his plan, he did obtain a letter of privilege from Pope Clement II, dated 1047, which gave him authority over the recently converted people of the North as well as the Baltic lands.⁷⁰ Adalbert's failure to achieve his goal was not least due to the independent stance that the Scandinavian rulers adopted against his policy.⁷¹ Thus King Haraldr harðráði of Norway refused to send bishops for consecration to Hamburg-Bremen and instead chose to dispatch them for the same purpose to England and France. In a letter to the metropolitan, written sometime between 1053 and 1066, Haraldr also refused to recognise his ecclesiastical authority in Norway, declaring that he did not know of any higher ecclesiastical authority within his realm save himself.⁷²

Although Adalbert had difficulties in imposing his authority over the core Nordic countries, his missionaries were frequent, even sought after, visitors in the more peripheral lands. Adam of Bremen tells that legates were dispatched from Gotland, Greenland, Iceland and Orkney "entreating him to send preachers as indeed he immediately did".⁷³

⁶⁷ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, tr. with an intro. and notes by Francis J. Tschan (New York, 1959), p. 183. "*Preterea Turolfum quendam posuit ad Orchadas. Illuc etiam misit Iohannem in Scotia ordinatum et alium quendam Adalbertum, cognominem suum*". *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, lxxvii, p. 224.

⁶⁸ *Adam of Bremen*, p. 183. *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, lxxvii, p. 224.

⁶⁹ Jón Jóhannesson 1956, pp. 167–173.

⁷⁰ This privilege was confirmed in 1053 and 1055 by succeeding popes, Leo IX and Victor II. *Regesta Norvegica I: 822–1263*, ed. by Erik Gunnes (Oslo, 1989), pp. 35–36.

⁷¹ Kolsrud 1958, pp. 175–179. Maurer, 1965/1855–56, pp. 649–667.

⁷² *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, xvii, p. 160. For the dating of this letter see *Regesta Norvegica*, p. 38.

⁷³ *Adam of Bremen*, p. 180. "*Inter quos extremi venerant Islani, Gronlani Gothorumque et Orchardum legati, petentes, ut illuc predicatorum dirigeret; quod et statim fecit*". *Magistri Adam Bremensis* III, lxxiii, pp. 220–221.

An outcome of this pleading was probably the commissioning of Turolf, Adalbert and John to the earldom of Orkney. About the last named little is known apart from Adam's aforementioned statement that he had been consecrated in Scotland.⁷⁴

Turolf (or Torolf) is the most interesting of these three bishops. Adam mentions islands "in the ocean off Norway", referring to the Northern and Western Isles, which nearly all "are now subject to the rule of the Norwegians and so are not to be overlooked by us because they also belong to the diocese of Hamburg".⁷⁵ Following a brief geographical description of the islands, Adam concludes his discussion by stating: "For these same Orkney Islands, although they had previously been ruled by English and Scottish bishops, our primate on the pope's order consecrated Turolf bishop for the city of Blascona, and he was to have the cure of all".⁷⁶ Although Adam does not provide a date for Turolf's ordination, it has been connected with Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson's pilgrimage to Rome.⁷⁷ OS tells that after Þorfinnr had finally secured his hold of the Orkney

⁷⁴ The assumption that Johann had also been a missionary in Iceland could well be built on a misunderstanding. Kolsrud 1913 B, p. 295. Jón Jóhannesson 1956, p. 171. True, in *Íslendingabók* a certain Jóhann (or Jón) "inn írski" is said to have worked as a missionary in Iceland for a few years. *Íslendingabók*, p. 18. Accordingly it is tempting to identify this Jóhann with his namesake in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae*. The nickname "inn írski" has been explained on the grounds that in the same chapter where the Orkney bishop is mentioned, Adam tells of another Jóhann, "a bishop of Scotland", who was killed in Slavia. *Magistri Adam Bremensis* III, lxxvii, p. 183. From the context, however, it is not at all clear that the two Jóhanns are one and the same person. *Hungvaka* then embellishes the brief reference in *Íslendingabók* with the addition that according to "some people's accounts" Jóhann went from Iceland to "Vindland", i.e. Pommern or Slavia, where he came to a martyr's death. *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek* 11, p. 94. The author of *Hungvaka*, writing in the early thirteenth century and almost certainly using a version of *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae*, has apparently, rightly or wrongly, associated the Jóhann mentioned in Ari's work with the missionary martyred by the Slavs. On the textual link between *Hungvaka* and Adam's work see Bibire 1993 B, p. 307. Turville-Petre suggests that the author may have been influenced by Adam's text through oral transmission and cites the example of Jóhann írski as possible evidence for this. Turville-Petre 1956, p. 204.

⁷⁵ *Adam of Bremen*, p. 215. "*Is habet ex adverso Nortmanniae insulas multas non ignobiles, quae nunc fere omnes Nortmannorum ditioni subiacent, ideoque non pretereundae sunt a nobis, quoniam Hammaburgensem parrochiam et ipsae respiciunt*". *Magistri Adam Bremensis* IV, xxxv, pp. 269–270.

⁷⁶ *Adam of Bremen*, p. 215. "*Ad easdem insulas Orchadas, quamvis prius ab Anglorum et Scothorum episcopis regerentur, noster primas iussu papae ordinavit Turolfum episcopum in civitatem Blasconam, qui omnium curas ageret*". *Magistri Adam Bremensis* IV, xxxv, p. 271.

⁷⁷ To my best knowledge P. A. Munch was the first to make this association in his *Det norske folks historie*. Munch 1855, pp. 216–217. But see Konrad Maurer's observations. Maurer 1965/1855–56, pp. 617–618.

earldom and following the death of King Magnús góði of Norway in 1047, he embarked on a tour which took him to Norway, Denmark, Saxony and Rome.⁷⁸ Also according to the saga, Þorfinnr's relationship with the Norwegian kings had been strained ever since King Ólafr Haraldsson had attempted to strengthen his lordship over the earldom around 1020.⁷⁹ The earl's dealings with Ólafr's son and successor, Magnús góði, were hardly more congenial, for as *OS* vividly describes, Þorfinnr had killed his co-earl Rögnvaldr Brúsason, the king's friend and supporter.⁸⁰

OS tells that prior to embarking on his journey south, Þorfinnr visited Haraldr harðráði in Norway who by that time had succeeded to the whole kingdom. The visit was a success and the king pledged his friendship.⁸¹ Admittedly it is uncertain whether at this stage Haraldr's animosity towards the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen had developed into the open hostility discernible in the 1050s.⁸² However, it is likely that his enmity and mistrust can be traced back to the wars he fought against King Sven Estridssen of Denmark who by that time (i.e. at the end of the 1040s) was on relatively good terms with Adalbert.⁸³ Against this background Adam's statement that Bishop Turolf was consecrated by Adalbert "*iussu papae*" becomes clearer. The process of ordaining a bishop in this period did not require the consent of the papacy. Even the act of founding a new bishopric was, on occasions, undertaken on the initiative of local rulers. For instance, in the early twelfth century, King Sigurðr Magnússon established a bishopric in Greenland, without apparently consulting higher ecclesiastical authorities.⁸⁴ It seems, however, that Earl Þorfinnr (or his legate) went directly to the pope, probably Leo IX (1048–1054), to have his bishop ordained, thus bypassing the authority of Hamburg-Bremen. The words "*iussu papae*" can hardly be interpreted otherwise. In view of the strained relations between the Norwegian king and the metropolitan, Þorfinnr may have found it advisable not to involve Adalbert in this matter. Thus Turolf was nominated by Þorfinnr, approved by the pope who then ordered

⁷⁸ *OS*, p. 85.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–79.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁸² See especially *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, xvii, pp. 159–161.

⁸³ Maurer 1965/1855–56, p. 660.

⁸⁴ Joys 1948, p. 143.

him to be consecrated by Archbishop Adalbert. Indeed it is worth noting that Icelanders adopted a similar procedure when they secured the consecration of their first bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson, in 1055/56.⁸⁵

Adam of Bremen claims that Turolf was consecrated to a particular episcopal seat, “*in civitatem Blasconam*”, a place-name which P. A. Munch was the first to interpret as a corrupt latinisation of *Birgsanam*, i.e. Birgisá (modern form: Birsay).⁸⁶ Later scholars have accepted Munch’s explanation and pointed out that this piece of information ties well with *OS* statement that Þorfinnr “lived usually in Birsay, and had Christ’s Kirk built there, a magnificent church. The episcopal seat in the Orkneys was first established there”.⁸⁷ But it should be noted that *OS* does not claim outright that Þorfinnr founded the Orkney bishopric but only that the episcopal seat “was first established there”. Still, Turolf’s episcopacy is of undoubted significance because with this, for the first time, the earl had become directly involved in the election of the Orkney bishop.

Thus in the 1060s a new phase had begun in the ecclesiastical development of Orkney. The missionary stage had ended and the bishop of the earldom had acquired a fixed place of residence under the protective wing of the secular authority. It is from the appointment of Bishop Turolf onwards that we see the earls of Orkney becoming increasingly involved in the episcopal affairs within their dominion.⁸⁸ Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson died c. 1065 and he was succeeded by his two sons, Páll and Erlendr. *OS* provides little information about their reign. The two appear to have initially shared the earldom undivided and in peace until, that is, their sons came of age. The saga also claims it was due to a disagreement between Hákon Pálsson and Erlingr Erlendsson that, on the advice of “men of good-will”, the earldom was divided into two parts.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Jón Jóhannesson 1956, pp. 173–175.

⁸⁶ Munch 1855, p. 217.

⁸⁷ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 189. “*Hann sat jafnan i Byrgisherade ok let þar gera Kristzkirkju, dyrligt musteri; þar var fyrst settir byskupsstoll i Orknneyjum*”. *OS*, p. 86. Although accepting the connection, Barbara E. Crawford points out that if it were not for the saga evidence “it seems unlikely that the names Blascona and Birsay would ever have been connected”. Crawford 1983, p. 103. It has usually been assumed that Kristkirkja, i.e. Christchurch, was located on the Brough of Birsay. Lamb, on the other hand, has argued that Þorfinnr founded a monastery on the Brough of Birsay near his palace and that Christchurch was built at the site of the parish kirk of St Magnús. Lamb 1983, pp. 36–46. *Idem* 1972–1974, pp. 200–205.

⁸⁸ See also Crawford 1983, p. 101.

⁸⁹ *OS*, pp. 92–93.

English sources are our main window into the ecclesiastical situation during the reign of Páll and Erlendr. This reflects an increasing interest by the archbishopric of York in bringing the Northern Isles (and indeed Scotland) into its sphere of influence. A letter (dated 1072/73) from Archbishop Thomas of York addressed to Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, tells that Páll Þorfinnsson had dispatched to him a cleric whom the earl had chosen as bishop for Orkney.⁹⁰ Thomas then asked Lanfranc to supply two bishops to attend the consecration at York. Lanfranc reacted swiftly and in a letter, which was probably written in the same year, he bade Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester and Bishop Peter of Dorchester to be of assistance.⁹¹ According to Hugh the Chanter, Radulf was the name of the bishop elect.⁹²

Páll's decision to have the successor of Turolf consecrated by the archbishop of York indicates a change of policy from the one pursued by Þorfinnr who apparently had had no dealings with York and, as noted, even attempted to bypass the authority of Hamburg-Bremen. What motives lay behind Páll's decision is difficult to evaluate. The sources are next to silent regarding the political situation in the Orkney around the time Lanfranc sent his letter; indeed it is not even wholly clear when the aforementioned division of the domain between the two brothers took place.⁹³ Judging from *OS* it seems to have occurred in the 1070s or the 1080s.⁹⁴ But the fact that the letter is solely addressed to Páll Þorfinnsson and no mention is made of Erlendr, suggests that the former was seeking a bishop exclusively for his part of the earldom.

Archbishop Adalbert died in 1072 and a successor had not been nominated. Accordingly Páll may have been forced to seek another ecclesiastical authority to consecrate his nominee.⁹⁵ An alternative route, however, was open to Earl Páll. The Icelanders had confronted a comparable dilemma after the Alþingi had chosen Gissur Ísleifsson in 1081 to succeed his father to the bishopric of Iceland,

⁹⁰ *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and tr. by Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1979), pp. 78–80 (no. 12).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81–83 (no. 13).

⁹² Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York 1066–1127*, ed. and tr. by Charles Johnson. Revised by M. Brett, C. N. L. Brooke, and M. Winterbottom. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1990), p. 32.

⁹³ Crawford 1983, p. 106.

⁹⁴ *OS*, p. 92.

⁹⁵ Crawford 1983, p. 106.

now with a permanent place at Skálholt. At that point in time Archbishop Liemar of Hamburg-Bremen was under papal excommunication as a result of his support for Emperor Henry IV. In this situation Gissur chose to turn directly to the papacy which duly dispatched him to Bishop Hartvig of Magdeburg for consecration.⁹⁶ Other Scandinavian bishops elect may well have followed the same route.⁹⁷ Páll's decision could have been influenced by the fact that the Orkney earls were more secure in their position in the reign of Ólafr kyrri (1066–1093) than they had ever been during the reigns of Magnús góði (1035–1047) and Haraldr harðráði (1046–1066). Ólafr was mainly occupied with internal affairs in Norway and he paid scant attention to his kingdom's more peripheral lands. Thus Páll may have found himself free to seek out the support of an English Church which had grown in prestige and influence following the Norman Conquest.⁹⁸ In any case, the simple fact that Páll had turned to York for the consecration of his candidate must have assured the English archbishopric that Orkney was now securely within its sphere of influence.

The reign of Páll and Erlendr was terminated by King Magnús berfætt's first expedition to the British Isles in 1098/99. The Norwegian king sent the two earls to Norway and installed his young son, Sigurðr, to rule the earldom under guardianship.⁹⁹ According to *OS* Bishop Vilhjálmr of Orkney was in office for sixty-six years, or from 1102 to his death in 1168.¹⁰⁰ If this statement is to be believed, Vilhjálmr assumed office during Sigurðr Magnússon's reign in Orkney (1098–1103).¹⁰¹ With the death of King Magnús in 1103, Sigurðr returned to Norway and succeeded his father. The saga also tells that Hákon Pálsson arrived in Orkney the following winter and took over the whole earldom. Hákon had been a loyal follower of King Magnús¹⁰² and one must assume that he acknowledged Bishop Vilhjálmr's position.

⁹⁶ *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek* 11, pp. 97–99.

⁹⁷ Joys 1948, p. 89.

⁹⁸ Thomas had professed personal obedience to Lanfranc in 1072. It is interesting to observe that the dispute between Lanfranc and Thomas about their respective status is reflected in the two letters relating to the Orkney bishop. See Gibson 1978, pp. 116–131. The Letters of Lanfranc, pp. 3–6. MacDonald 1926, pp. 191–197.

⁹⁹ *OS*, pp. 100–103. Power 1986, p. 118.

¹⁰⁰ *OS*, p. 121.

¹⁰¹ Kolsrud 1958, p. 180.

¹⁰² *OS*, pp. 98–106.

About Vilhjálmr we hear nothing until after the death of Earl Magnús. There are indications, however, that his position in the earldom was less than secure in the decade or so leading up to Magnús' slaying on Egilsay. In a letter dated to 1108/1109, Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury—who involved himself in Orcadian affairs as a result of a vacancy in York between May 1108 and April 1109¹⁰³—implored Earl Hákon to uphold and strengthen the Christian religion within his earldom and subject himself to a certain bishop whose name is not divulged.¹⁰⁴ Anselm presumably refers here to a certain Roger who was consecrated by Archbishop Gerard of York sometime between June 1100 and February 1108.¹⁰⁵ At this point in time the earldom was divided between Magnús Erlendsson and Hákon Pálsson, although in Anselm's letter this state of affairs is not recognized. Thus everything points to Hákon holding a protective hand over Bishop Vilhjálmr and preventing the York candidate from taking up his position.

Not long after Anselm composed his letter, Roger must either have died or given up his claim to the Orkney bishopric, for at some point between 1109 and 1114 Archbishop Thomas II of York consecrated a certain Radulf Nowell, a priest from York, to the same see.¹⁰⁶ Our knowledge of this development derives from Hugh the Chanter, writing his account between 1137 and 1149, who was close to archbishop Thurstan of York (1119–1140).¹⁰⁷ The most interesting aspect of Hugh's reference to Radulf is that he tells of Orcadians being involved in his consecration: "*Radulphum vero, urbis Eboracensis presbyterum, in ecclesia Sancti Petri ab Orcadensibus electum T[homas] Orcadum insularum ordinavit episcopum . . .*".¹⁰⁸ This is an important indication that the claim of York to ecclesiastical authority over Orkney was more than a symbolic gesture: the archbishopric appears to have exploited divisions within the earldom to further its agenda. Although the identity of the Orcadians mentioned by Hugh the Chanter cannot be

¹⁰³ Watt 1969, p. 248.

¹⁰⁴ *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*. Vol. V: *Epistolae Anselmi*, ed. by F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 396 (letter no. 449).

¹⁰⁵ Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York*, p. 52. However, the possibility cannot be excluded that Anselm is referring here to Radulf. It is not known when Radulf died or gave up his office.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁷ Gransden 1974, pp. 123–125.

¹⁰⁸ Hugh the Chanter, *The History*, p. 52.

established, it is tempting to see them as followers of Earl Magnús Erlingsson who were seeking a bishop to counter the authority of Bishop Vilhjálmr.

This second Radulf is mentioned in a letter issued by Pope Calixtus II on October 19, 1119, at the council of Rheims.¹⁰⁹ The letter is addressed to all the bishops of Scotland that were subject to the metropolitan see of York and was composed at the request of Thurstan, the newly consecrated archbishop.¹¹⁰ Calixtus' bull is a general exhortation to the bishops in Scotland to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the new archbishop of York and, as such, it yields no information regarding Radulf's position in Orkney. But in another bull promulgated on the same occasion, the pope commands the co-rulers of Norway, Sigurðr Magnússon and Eysteinn Magnússon (in their capacity as Hákon's overlords), to allow Radulf to enjoy in peace his episcopal rights.¹¹¹ Finally, in 1125, Pope Honorius II addressed a letter to King Sigurðr in which he claimed that Archbishop Thomas had consecrated Radulf to Orkney but that an intruder had arrived in the see.¹¹²

If Bishop Vilhjálmr is the intruder mentioned in Pope Honorius' letter it may appear odd that it took York and Rome over fifteen years to denounce him.¹¹³ Assuming that Vilhjálmr came into office in 1102, or seven years before the York candidate was consecrated to Orkney, it is difficult to envisage how he could have intruded on Radulf Nowell's position. Of course the pieces of the puzzle would fall more smoothly into place if, as some have maintained, *OS* is not to be trusted regarding the length of Vilhjálmr's episcopacy. For instance, if Vilhjálmr had been bishop for fifty-six winters, instead of the sixty-six claimed by *OS*, and thus took up office in 1112,¹¹⁴ he would have intruded on an already incumbent bishop (whether present in Orkney or not), that is Radulf Nowell who, as noted, was consecrated sometime between 1109 and 1114. Moreover this implies that

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 124–126.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹¹¹ *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, vol. III, ed. by J. Raine. Rolls Series (London, 1894), p. 39 (illustrative document no. 21).

¹¹² “*Auribus nostris intimatum est, quod venerabilis frater noster, Thomas Eboracensis archiepiscopus, Radulfum Orcheneia episcopum consecravit. Postmodum vero, sicut accepimus, alius est ibidem intrusus*”. *Ibid.*, p. 51 (illustrative document no. 34).

¹¹³ Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York*, p. xlviii (fn. 5).

¹¹⁴ First suggested by Munch 1855, p. 622.

King Sigurðr had chosen Vilhjálmr (perhaps in association with his brother and co-ruler King Eysteinn) after the Norwegian ruler came back from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land c. 1110. In turn, this appointment would be in tune with other episcopal appointments which Sigurðr oversaw around the same time in both Norway and Greenland.¹¹⁵ Although the question whether Vilhjálmr came into office in 1102 or 1112 cannot be answered with any certainty, it is evident that up until c. 1125 there was considerable pressure on both the earls of Orkney and the kings of Norway to remove him from his post.

Radulf Nowell's position in the earldom of Orkney may have been stronger than indicated in either the Icelandic or the English sources. It is noticeable that Calixtus' letter was issued only two or three years after the death of Earl Magnús Erlendsson. As Earl Magnús had had notable ties with England and Scotland it is possible that Radulf was the bishop for his half of the earldom.¹¹⁶ With the death of his secular patron he may then have been forced to leave his see. The Worcester chronicle mentions Radulf in relation to Archbishop Thurstan of York's consecration of the bishop of St Andrews in 1128.¹¹⁷ This work also tells that Radulf had not been elected with the assent of the "*principis terrae*",¹¹⁸ the clergy or the people he was supposed to serve. Radulf was shunned by everyone and, because he was not a bishop of any city, he was attached to either York or Durham and employed there as a suffragan.¹¹⁹ In brief, it seems that Earl Páll continued his father's policy regarding the Orkney bishopric: to protect the position of Bishop Vilhjálmr and deny the claim of the York candidate. It is worth noting, however, that this did not prevent Earl Páll Hákonarson from enjoying good relations with King Henry I

¹¹⁵ See for instance Joys 1948, pp. 95–107. Although the archbishopric of Lund, established in 1104, had *de jure* authority over the Norwegian Church the kings of Norway appear to have continued to nominate bishops on their own initiative. They did, however, on occasions have their candidates approved by Lund. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹¹⁶ See Crawford 1983, pp. 107–111.

¹¹⁷ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III: *The Annals from 1067 to 1140 with the Gloucester Interpolations and the Continuation to 1141*, ed. and tr. by P. McGurk. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1998), p. 174.

¹¹⁸ It is not clear whether this is a reference to the king of Norway or the Orkney earl (or even both).

¹¹⁹ "*Qui Radulphus quoniam nec principis terre, nec cleri, nec plebis electione vel assensu fuerat ordinatus, ab omnibus refutatus et in loco pontificis a nemine susceptus erat. Hic, quia nullius episcopus urbis, modo Eboracensi modo Dunholmensi adherens ab eis sustentabatur, et vicarius utriusque in episcopalibus ministeriis habebatur*". *The Chronicle of John*, p. 174.

of England in the 1120s.¹²⁰ The thwarted Radulf is later glimpsed in contemporary chronicles, some of which mention him delivering in 1138 a rousing speech to the English before their battle against King David I of Scotland (the Battle of the Standard).¹²¹

An outline has been provided of the history of the Orkney bishopric from the first half of the eleventh century to the fourth decade of the twelfth century.¹²² In the earliest phase the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen consecrated bishops that operated in the earldom on a missionary basis. A second stage in the development was reached around the middle of the eleventh century when the bishop of Orkney assumed a fixed place of residence and the earls began to take a close interest in their nomination. Vilhjálmr's episcopacy marked a new stage in the development of the Orkney bishopric. For (at least) the first two decades of his reign in office his position had been decidedly precarious. Although Vilhjálmr had enjoyed support from Norway and the Páll-line of the ruling dynasty, neither York nor the papacy recognised the legitimacy of his authority. A rival candidate, moreover, was waiting in the wings and had perhaps already made his presence felt.

However, around the time Vilhjálmr began promoting the sanctity of Earl Magnús his position had seemingly become unassailable. Although Pope Honorius' letter of 1125 shows that York had not formally relinquished its claim over the Orkney bishopric, the reference in the Worcester chronicles suggests that its candidate, Radulf Nowell, had effectively given up hope of assuming office. Indeed in the period between 1125 and the establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53 no more is heard of York's involvement in the ecclesiastical affairs of Orkney. Thus by the early 1130s the external threat to Bishop Vilhjálmr's position had receded and now the bishop could afford to loosen the ties that had bound him to his main secular patron. From the beginning Vilhjálmr's episcopacy had been intimately associated with the Páll-line of the ruling house. The

¹²⁰ "Paulus Orcadum comes, quanvis Noricorum regi hereditario iure subiectus, ita regis amicitias suscipiebat ut crebra ei munuscula missitaret. Nam et illa prona uoluptate exterarum terrarum miracula inhiabat . . .". *William of Malmesbury*, p. 740.

¹²¹ Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum. The History of the English People*, ed. and tr. by Diana Greenway. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1996), pp. 712–716. See also *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, vol. I, ed. by W. Stubbs, Rolls Series (London, 1867–1871), p. 193.

¹²² The outline of this development has, of course, been drawn by other scholars. See for instance, Crawford, 1983. *Idem* 1996.

sources can sustain the interpretation that from the last quarter of the eleventh century the resident bishops in the isles had effectively been the private chaplains of this particular line of the Orkney dynasty. Naturally this arrangement was of undoubted benefit to the bishop in times of uncertainty. But with changing ecclesiastical and political circumstances the dependence of the Orkney bishop on the Páll-line diminished.

Within this context the deeper motives that lay behind Vilhjálmr's canonization of Earl Magnús emerge. By presenting himself as a guardian of the relics of an earl who had been the victim of inter-dynastic feud, Vilhjálmr gave a clear signal that his authority no longer rested on the support of any one scion of the ruling house. In this respect the *translatio* of the relics from Birsay to Kirkwall was both a practical and a symbolic act. Birsay had been both the main episcopal centre in the earldom and the power-seat of the Páll-line¹²³ while Kirkwall had traditionally lain within the half of the earldom ruled by the Erlendr-line.¹²⁴ But Vilhjálmr's translation of the relics to Kirkwall did not simply represent a change of allegiance from one dynastic line to the other, for now a new factor in the three-way relationship between the bishop and the two competing earldom lines had emerged. As the keeper of Magnús' relics in Kirkwall the Orkney bishop had acquired a patron whose authority was not dependent on the shifting political situation within the earldom; in this sense the cult helped to strengthen the identity and independence of his bishopric. Placed against this backdrop the timing of Vilhjálmr's canonization of Earl Magnús—when Earl Páll's authority was being eroded and Earl Rögnvaldr had not fully made his presence felt—appears both opportune and highly symbolic.

In Scandinavia cults of native saints played a role in enhancing the identity and independence of newly established bishoprics. In the first half of the twelfth century the Norwegian bishoprics of Nidaros and Oslo appropriated the cults of St Ólafr and St Hallvard (see ch. 3.1 and 3.2) respectively, while the bishopric of Bergen upheld the sanctity of the virgin St Sunniva (who, according to her legend, was killed in Norway).¹²⁵ At the tail end of the twelfth century the

¹²³ Crawford 1983, pp. 110–118.

¹²⁴ Clouston 1936, p. 36.

¹²⁵ The relics of the martyr were translated in 1170 from Selja to Bergen. Helle 1997, pp. 249–250.

Icelandic Alþingi recognised the sanctity of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson of Skálholt and Bishop Jón Ögmundarson of Hólar and both became patron saints of their bishoprics. Around the same time or slightly later the bishopric of Århus began promoting the cult of Niels, son of King Knud Magnusson of Denmark (see ch. 4.4). To a greater degree than imported saints' cults, "new" and local cults of this kind could be shaped according to needs of the bishoprics and, in the process, provide them with heavenly patrons that could counterweight the authority and the prestige of the earthly ones. But not all bishoprics chose to adopt or launch indigenous cults. Thus the cathedral of the see of Stavanger, established in the 1120s, was dedicated to St Swithun. This was probably the work of the English Reinald (or Rainald), who may have been the first bishop of the see.¹²⁶ Similarly, the archbishopric of Lund did not promote a cathedral-centred cult of a native saint; the patron of the cathedral was the well-known St Lawrence whose relics formed a part of an impressive relic-collection which the archbishop and his chapter had apparently amassed since the early twelfth century.¹²⁷

Thus the promotion of these native cults could only but enhance the identity of bishoprics, which had relatively recently taken up permanent seats in urban or proto-urban centres. But of course there were important differences between the Orkney bishopric and, for instance, the diocese of Bergen in Norway. Most notably, in a territorial sense the authority of the Orkney bishop corresponded closely with the temporal power of earl. Furthermore, considering that the main ecclesiastical center at Birsay was also the seat of the earl (or, more precisely, one line of the earldom dynasty), the Orkney bishop had limited opportunities to enhance the profile of his see. It is this peculiar situation that explains why the *translatio* of his relics coincided with the translation of the episcopal seat from Birsay to Kirkwall; the office of the Orkney bishop had become synonymous with the relics of the newly-elevated martyr.

¹²⁶ Lapidge 2003, p. 56. A shrine of St Swithun is attested in Stavanger cathedral in the early thirteenth century. *Eirspennill*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson. Den Norske historiske kildeskriftkommisjon (Christiania 1913), p. 445.

¹²⁷ Most probably that the archbishopric inherited the association with St Lawrence from an earlier, royally founded, church in Lund dedicated to the saint. The German kings and emperors of the eleventh century vigorously promoted the cult of St Lawrence and their sometime ally, King Sven Estridsson of Denmark, is likely to have brought it to Scandinavia, see Cinthio 1990.

Repairs on St Magnus Cathedral in 1848 led to the discovery of a stone cist that contained Bishop Vilhjálmr's remains. Within it a lead plate was found on which the following was inscribed: H. REQUIESCIT: WILLIAMVS: SENEX FELICIS MEMORIE. On the other side the inscription reads: PMVS EPIS, i.e. the first bishop of Orkney.¹²⁸ Although the latter inscription is factually incorrect, it does suggest that in the second half of the twelfth century people felt that there had been something special about Vilhjálmr's episcopacy. And in a sense this was not far from the mark because it was during his time in office that the bishopric took a crucial step in establishing its own identity; for that purpose the cult of St Magnús Erlendsson played an important role. Hence it can be claimed with some justification that Vilhjálmr's episcopacy heralded the beginning of a new era in the history of the Orkney see.

But it would, of course, be a mistake to assume that from this time onwards the Orkney bishops were independent of the earls' patronage. Indeed it has been argued that Kirkwall Cathedral functioned throughout the Middle Ages as a kind of "proportorial church" of the Orkney earls.¹²⁹ There can be little doubt, however, that the cult of Earl Magnús played a role in improving both the fiscal independence and the spiritual prestige of the Orkney see. As the miracle accounts show Kirkwall became a focal point for religious life in the earldom, both as the seat of the Orkney bishop and as a centre of pilgrimage.¹³⁰

2.4. *The Translation of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali*

The relatively independent status of the Orkney bishops in the second half of the twelfth century is illustrated by the translation of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali which, according to Icelandic annals, was undertaken by Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson in 1192.¹³¹ *OS* describes it in the following manner:

¹²⁸ Mooney 1924–1925, p. 243.

¹²⁹ Cant 1995, p. 105.

¹³⁰ The earliest evidence relating to fiscal matters of the bishopric dates from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Andersen 1988, pp. 60–64.

¹³¹ *Íslandske annaler*, pp. 120, 180, 324.

Andlaazdagr Rognvalldz iarls kala er v nottum eftir Mariumesso hina fyrri um sumarit. Foru þeir Haralldr iarl þadan ut i Orkneyiar med likit med fogru foruneyti, ok veittu groft at Magnuskirkiu ok hvilldi hann þar til þers er gud birti hans verdleika med morgum ok storum iarteinum, enn Biarni byskup let upp taka helgan dom hans at leyfvi pafvans. þar a steininum, sem blod Rognvalldz iarls hafdi a komit, þa er hann letz, ma sia enn i dag svo fagrt sem nyblætt sec.¹³²

Earl Rögnvald Kali's death-day is five days after the first Assumption of Saint Mary in summer. Earl Harald and his men went thence out to the Orkneys with the body with a goodly company, and prepared a tomb in Saint Magnus Cathedral, and it remained there till the time that God revealed his merit with many great miracles, and Bishop Bjarni by the leave of the Pope had his relics taken up. There on the stone which the blood of Earl Rognvald had dropped on when he lost his life, that blood may be seen even to-day as if it were new-shed.¹³³

This passage yields no information about the state of the cult in the period between Rögnvaldr's death in 1158/59 and his local canonization in 1192 (the papal approval is of course fictional). Nothing is told of miracles taking place at the site where Rögnvaldr died, or of rumours about his sanctity. Indeed the statement that his earthly remains were kept in St Magnus Cathedral "till the time that God revealed his merit with many great miracles" may indicate that his cult was a relatively recent phenomenon in the early 1190s. Moreover, the cult appears to have been the creation of Bishop Bjarni, and the earl, Haraldr Maddaðararson, is not mentioned in connection with the canonization.

A few years prior to the canonization of 1192 a grandson of Earl Rögnvaldr, Haraldr ungi Eiríksson, had received the title of earl from King Magnús Erlingsson of Norway along with the overlordship of half Caithness from King William I of Scotland (see ch. 4.3). Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson, however, refused to share the earldom with his younger namesake. Here a parallel has been seen between the emergence of the cults of St Magnús and that of Earl Rögnvaldr. In both cases the position of reigning earls (i.e. Páll and Haraldr) of the Páll-line was threatened by a member of the Erlendr-line (i.e. Rögnvaldr and Haraldr ungi) and, moreover, in both instances bishops of Orkney (i.e. Vilhjálmr and Bjarni) sanctified a member of the

¹³² *OS*, pp. 315–316.

¹³³ *The Orkneyinga saga*, pp. 337–38.

Erlendr-line. Thus the conclusion has been reached that “Haraldr Maddadsson and Bishop Bjarni must have seen dangers in the cult of Rögnvald, but apparently proved equally powerless to stand in the way of popular enthusiasm”.¹³⁴

But in contrast to the cult of St Magnús, there is no indication that popular enthusiasm was a factor behind Bishop Bjarni’s decision to translate Rögnvaldr’s earthly remains. Also, there is no evidence that Haraldr ungi posed a threat to Earl Haraldr’s position before 1197/98. In fact, *Sverris saga* tells that in 1195 Bishop Bjarni helped Haraldr Maddaðarson in his negotiation with Sverrir Sigurðarson after the Orkney earl had supported an unsuccessful uprising against the Norwegian King (1193/94).¹³⁵ Thus it appears that Bjarni was on good terms with Haraldr Maddaðarson and the bishop was in fact related to the Páll-line of the dynasty.¹³⁶ Rather it seems that it was the desire to honour the founder of St Magnus Cathedral, and the hope that a new cult might further enhance Kirkwall as a place of pilgrimage, which provided the incentive for the earl’s canonization.¹³⁷ An additional feature of his cult may have been the promotion of Rögnvaldr as an ideal ruler.¹³⁸ In brief, the fact that Bishop Bjarni was secure enough to carry out a local canonization of a member of the Erlendr-line of the Orkney dynasty whilst a member of the Páll-line was in power, suggests that the standing of the Orkney bishops in relation to the secular authority had noticeably improved in the course of the twelfth century.

2.5. Concluding Observations

Erich Hoffmann, in his study *Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern. Königsheiliger und Königshaus*, emphasised the

¹³⁴ Thomson 1987, p. 76.

¹³⁵ *Sverris Saga etter Cod. AM 327 4o*, ed. by Gustav Indrebø (Kristiania, 1920), p. 131.

¹³⁶ Bjarni was a second cousin of Earl Haraldr. Crawford 1996, p. 12.

¹³⁷ For a comparable interpretation, see Crawford 1998, pp. 33–37. Crawford also points out that it is likely that Bishop Bjarni was behind the extension of the east end of St Magnus Cathedral which was undertaken to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims visiting the shrines of the two Orcadian saints. On the architectural aspect see Cant 1988, pp. 127–140.

¹³⁸ Ciklamini 1970, p. 57.

political role played by the princely cults in medieval Scandinavia. In Hoffmann's view they were created and maintained in order to add legitimacy and prestige to the secular power, in particular to narrow succession to one particular branch of the ruling house:

Die Einrichtung und Förderung der Kulte für die königlichen Märtyrer stand in einem sehr engen Zusammenhang mit den Thronfolgeordnungen in den drei Reichen und den Bestrebungen einzelner machtvoller Könige, die Königssippe ihres Landes auf den eigenen Familienzweig zu beschränken.¹³⁹

Although Hoffmann does not deal with St Magnús, his general conclusions can be applied to the cult of the Orkney martyr. From the perspective of Hoffmann's model Orkney represents a sort of miniature version of the three major Scandinavian lands. This is only, however, true up to a point. It was the highest ecclesiastical authority in the Northern Isles (the bishop) that, on its own initiative, officially recognised the sanctity of Earl Magnús. This act can only be understood when placed within the context of both the prevailing ecclesiastical and political situation. In the final analysis it helped to enhance the position of the Orkney bishopric within a society where the ecclesiastical authority was almost totally dependent on the patronage of the secular arm. In such a situation it was essential for the Church (as far as it acted as an independent body) to adapt to existing circumstances and play the few cards she held to the utmost. In this respect Vilhjálmr's promotion of the Magnús cult is an example of the way the ecclesiastical authority could enhance its own position by aligning and adapting its own interest to that of the secular power.

The case of St Magnús' cult is a relatively straightforward one: we have mostly had to rely on a single source in which the secular and ecclesiastical authorities were represented by only two figures, Earl Rögnvaldr and Bishop Vilhjálmr. Still the pattern that emerges from this one case justifies a closer look at the evidence regarding the emergence of the better-known cults of secular leaders in eleventh- and twelfth-century Scandinavia.

¹³⁹ Hoffmann 1975, p. 210.

PART THREE

MARTYR-CULTS OF SECULAR LEADERS IN ELEVENTH- AND TWELFTH-CENTURY SCANDINAVIA

3.1. *St Ólafr Haraldsson of Norway*

The cult of St Ólafr Haraldsson originated in a period marked by two pivotal developments in medieval Norwegian history: the emergence of Christian kingship and the organisation of the Church. The history of the cult cannot be divorced from these developments. At the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson in 1163/1164, overseen by Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson of Nidaros, the king vowed to rule justly and support and protect the Church's independence. Not long after the coronation these promises were further expressed in a Letter of Privileges (*Privilegiebrev*) in which Magnús acknowledged Ólafr Haraldsson as the ultimate ruler of the realm while at the same time presenting himself as the saint's vassal on earth.¹ In addition, the archbishop of Nidaros, in his capacity as guardian of Ólafr's relics, was granted fiscal privileges for his see.

In 1163/64 Church and Crown appropriated the cult of St Ólafr in order to enhance their own political and ecclesiastical agenda.² By receiving his crown directly from St Ólafr, Magnús Erlingsson not only asserted his divine right to kingship, but also side-stepped the sensitive issue of his (somewhat weak) hereditary claim to the throne. Similarly, the archbishop's endorsement of Magnús' kingship

¹ “*Deo namque in hac die gloriose resurrectionis me cum regno in perpetuum et glorioso martyri regi Ola(u)o [cui] integraliter speciali deuotione secundo post dominum regnum assigno Norvegie, et huic regno, quantum deo placuerit, velut eiusdem gloriosi martyris possessioni hereditarie sub eius dominio tamquam suus vicarius et ab eo tenens presidebo*”. *Latinske dokument til norsk historie fram til år 1204*, ed. by E. Vandvik (Oslo, 1959), p. 60. Schreiner, 1946–1948, pp. 518–534. Tobiassen 1964, pp. 181–273. Hoffmann 1990, pp. 125–137.

² Of course there was more to this scenario than the alliance between two abstract institutional identities; concrete political considerations were also at play. Archbishop Eysteinn belonged to a powerful family in Trøndelag while Magnús' father, Erlingr skakki, had built up a strong political base in the Vestlandet and the Viken region. Thus the alliance served the interests of two prominent political factions. Bagge 2003, p. 68. Helle 2003, p. 374.

was a calculated move, which aimed at securing a more stable royal authority. The king, in turn, was expected to consolidate and extend the precious independence that the Church had acquired in the course of the twelfth century, especially following the founding of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53.³ Thus in 1163/64 the cult of St Ólafr provided a bridge between the interests of *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. In a different sense the cult served in this period as a barometer for the relationship between the two authorities; in this respect the change in the guardianship of the saint's corporal relics is particularly telling.⁴ According to saga tradition the eleventh-century kings of Norway treated the relics as their personal possession. *Heimskringla* tells that before Haraldr harðráði embarked on his ill-fated invasion of England in 1066, he locked the reliquary and threw the key into the river Nid.⁵ A century or so later Eysteinn crowned Magnús Erlingsson both in his capacity as archbishop of Nidaros and as the guardian of Ólafr's reliquary.

Thus in 1163/64 Church and Crown presented themselves as partners with St Ólafr sanctifying their respective powers. The equilibrium between the two authorities did not last; it ended with the fall of Magnús Erlingsson at the battle of Fimreiti in 1184 which effectively heralded the beginning of Sverrir Sigurðarson's sole rulership in Norway. In the civil war both factions had claimed to have the backing of St Ólafr. On one side there was King Sverrir enforcing laws attributed to the saint, declaring that he had experienced visions in which Ólafr in dubbed him as his warrior and designated heir.⁶ In the other camp there was Archbishop Eysteinn who, as discussed, is

³ For an historiographical survey of the Norwegian (and indeed the Scandinavian) Church see Bagge 2005, esp. 25–26.

⁴ On the eleventh-century shrines of St Ólafr, see Ekroll 2003, pp. 325–329.

⁵ *Heimskringla* III, pp. 175–176. This story captures well the close identification of the Norwegian kings with the cult of St Ólafr. A less well-known account, preserved in the thirteenth-century *Chronica Manniae*, tells how King Magnús berfættir dared to open the reliquary on his own accord. Shortly afterwards Ólafr appeared to Magnús in a dream and told him that in punishment for his deed he must choose between two options: to stay in Norway and die shortly thereafter or to try his luck abroad. The king chose the latter option and embarked on a military expedition to the British Isles on which he was killed (1103). *Chronica Regum Manniae et Insularum. The Chronicle of Man and the Sudreys*, ed. by P. A. Munch (Christiania, 1860), p. 6. The two accounts also neatly sum up the ambivalent nature of the relationship between the Norwegian kings and St Ólafr. While Ólafr brings lustre and legitimacy to their rule, they are no more than his substitute rulers on earth and any transgression on their part will be punished.

⁶ *Sverris Saga*, pp. 3–5.

believed to have completed the *Passio et miracula* in honour of the saint during his exile in England (1180–83). When Eysteinn returned to Norway, he concentrated on extending his cathedral so it would be fit to host Ólafr's relics. The cult was, of course, not confined to the Norwegian scene. King Ólafr was the first native saint of the Nordic lands and, to a certain extent, the patron saint of that whole region. As early as the second half of the eleventh century his cult had become well known in Denmark⁷ and church dedications testify that Ólafr was a popular saint in the Northern Isles.⁸ So, when the Danes and the Orcadians later acquired their own princely cults, they were familiar with the concept of a cult of a secular ruler.⁹

The familiar story behind King Ólafr Haraldsson's martyrdom does not require detailed retelling here.¹⁰ Ólafr was born around 995 and came to the throne in 1015, thus filling the power vacuum that had been left as result of King Canute's preoccupation with consolidating his authority in England. It has usually been assumed that Ólafr both saw and presented himself as a member of the *Ynglingar* dynasty which, according to tradition, had claimed Norway as their own *óðal*, or ancestral land, since at least the reign of Haraldr hárfagri in the first half of the tenth century. Whether Ólafr ever made such a claim, or whether this is a construction of later medieval commentators, are still debated questions.¹¹ In any event, King Canute was not willing to surrender his influence over Norway and in 1028 his henchmen joined forces with local magnates in Trøndelag, who saw their position threatened by the king's centralizing efforts, and in tandem they forced Ólafr into exile. Two years later, as the news reached Ólafr about the loss at sea of Canute's main henchman in Norway, Earl Hákon Eiríksson, he left his asylum in Russia and returned to Norway. The army which Ólafr was able to assemble was no match for the one which awaited him at the fields of Stiklastaðir where there the king suffered defeat and death.

⁷ Not least through King Magnús' promotion of his father's cult during his rule in Denmark (1042–47). Nyberg 1997.

⁸ Dickins 1937–45, pp. 74–76.

⁹ A similar observation has been made in relation to Sweden and the Swedish cult of King Erik Jedvardson. Janse 1903, p. 163.

¹⁰ Among the numerous retellings of Ólafr's life a concise one is provided in Brøgger 1949, pp. 374–390. For a useful introduction to the twelfth- and thirteenth century corpus on Ólafr Haraldsson, see Ugulen 2004.

¹¹ Krag 1989, pp. 288–302.

No extant near-contemporary narrative source deals with the earliest stages of St Ólafr's cult and it is uncertain whether any was composed. Instead the testimony of (late) twelfth- and thirteenth-century sagas on this issue has been taken more or less at face value. The most influential account appears in *Heimskringla* which, following an unknown source, tells that two farmers transported Ólafr's body from the battlefield to the outskirts of the town of Nidaros where it was kept overnight in a deserted shed (*eyðiskemma*). The corpse was then buried in a nearby location where it lay for a whole year.¹² When rumour arose that Ólafr was a saint, the people of the region of Trøndelag called on Bishop Grímkell—an Englishman who had worked alongside Ólafr as a missionary—to return from his voluntary exile. Hearing of the miracles which the fallen king was reported to have performed, Grímkell approached Einar Eindriðason þambarskelfir, a prominent chieftain in the Trøndelag region who had not taken part in the stand against Ólafr. Then, the saga states, Grímkell and Einar brought Ólafr's sanctity to the attention of Canute's new substitute rulers, his young son Sven, and his Anglo-Saxon mother, Álfifa (Ælgifu). Sven told Grímkell and Einar to take whatever action that they deemed appropriate and on August 3, 1031, the bishop translated Ólafr's corporal relics to St Clement's Church in Trondheim.¹³ Prior to placing them upon the altar, Bishop Grímkell proclaimed him a saint and the king assented to this judgement along with those present.¹⁴

¹² *Heimskringla* II, pp. 397–398. On this episode see Blom 1996, pp. 49–52. On the archaeological evidence relating to St Ólafr's first resting place, see Christophersen 1992, pp. 39–67.

¹³ *Heimskringla* II, pp. 403–404.

¹⁴ It has been argued that Theodoricus monachus refers to a lost account of the translation in the following passage: "*Quomodo vero mox omnipotens Deus merita martyris sui Olavi declaraverit cæcis visum reddendo et multa commoda ægris mortalibus impendendo, et qualiter episcopus Grímkell . . . post annum et quinque dies beatum corpus e terra levaverit et in loco decenter ornato reposuerit in Nidrosiensi metropoli, quo statim peccata pugna transvectum fuerat, quia hæc omnia a nonnullis memoriæ tradita sunt, nos notis immorari superfluum duximus*". *Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ*, pp. 43–44. Holtsmark 1956. Einar Skúlason could have been familiar with this lost *translatio* when he composed *Geisli* on the occasion of the founding of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigting* A I, pp. 459–473. Holtsmark 1956, pp. 121–133. In addition it has been pointed out that Sighvatr Þórðarsson's *Eifdrápa*, composed around 1040, may contain a reference to a mass for King Ólafr. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning* A I, p. 245. Holtsmark 1956; Storm 1891. This opens up the possibility that an *officium* dedicated to St Ólafr was in place at this early date. It is just as possible, however, that Sighvatr referred here to "a private celebration of some kind, and not necessarily a grand, nationwide establishment of a patron saint". Østrem 2001, p. 38.

A noteworthy feature of the saga tradition relating to Ólafr's canonization is King Sven Álfifuson's role in the proceedings.¹⁵ The saga claims that the king, in co-operation with Bishop Grímkell, attended and oversaw this event.¹⁶ Interestingly, *Fagrskinna*, a compilation from the first quarter of the thirteenth century and likely of Norwegian origin, tells that Ólafr's body was not elevated on the advice of Grímkell but that of a certain Sigurðr.¹⁷ This missionary bishop had been in the king's entourage and he should probably be identified with the Sigurðr who is referred to in a *scholium* in Adam's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*.¹⁸ *Fagrskinna* relates that Sven and Álfifa were involved in the canonization, as does the so-called *Legendary saga of St Olaf*, possibly a Norwegian composition which is preserved in a manuscript from the middle of the thirteenth century, but believed to have been composed in the early part of that century.¹⁹ The testimony of the *Legendary saga* may be of an even older provenance.²⁰

In one respect Snorri Sturluson's rendering of events differs from what we find in older works than *Heimskringla*, most notably *Fagrskinna* and the *Legendary saga*. Snorri alone highlights the role played by the powerful chieftain Einar þambarskelfir in the official recognition of

¹⁵ On Grímkell (or Grímkellus), one of the missionary bishops who is said to have come to Norway with King Ólafr Tryggvason, see Johnsen 1975, pp. 22–34. On the activities of English missionary bishops in Norway in general see Jørgensen 1996, pp. 37–43. Abrams 1995, pp. 21–41. Although the evidence is far from conclusive it is tempting to identify Bishop Grímkell with Bishop Grímkellus of Selsey (1038–1047). It is an interesting possibility that he was of a noble family from Devon and related to Aelnoth, archbishop of Canterbury (1020–1038). (Birkeli 1995, pp. 159–161). This would accord well with the fact that the earliest known liturgical material on the saint is from England (middle of the eleventh century). See *Libri Liturgici*, pp. 123–128. Hohler 1972, pp. 39–47. See also Dickins 1937–45, pp. 53–80, esp. pp. 56–57. E. Bull argues that the cult of St Ólafr entered the British Isles by two routes: from Orkney into Northern Scotland and from Norway to the east coast of England. Bull 1912–13, pp. 135–148. For a more recent discussion of the cult in England see Coviaux 2002.

¹⁶ *Heimskringla* II, pp. 403–405.

¹⁷ “*Einum vætri eftir fall Ólafs konongs var upp tækninn licamr hans oc skrinlagðr at augn-siandum allum Þrændum. at raðe Sigurðar biskups. þar varo þau oc Svæinn oc Álfifa möðer hans*”. *Fagrskinna*, p. 183. “One winter after the fall of King Ólafr his body was exhumed and enshrined in the sight of all the people of Trøndelag on the advice of Bishop Sigurðr. Also present were Sven and his mother Álfifa”. My own translation. Snorri may have been familiar with *Fagrskinna* when he composed *Heimskringla*.

¹⁸ *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, lxxvii, p. 233.

¹⁹ *Olafs saga hins helga; Die “Legendarische Saga” über Olaf den Heiligen (Hs. Delagard. saml. nr. 8^{II})*, ed. and tr. by A. Heinrichs et al. (Heidelberg, 1982), p. 206.

²⁰ For an edition and discussion of this account see Louis-Jensen 1970, pp. 53–59.

King Ólafr's sanctity.²¹ Einar and Bishop Grímkell in tandem, representing the people of Trøndelag, plead with King Sven and Álfifa for Ólafr's corporal remains to be elevated. In the absence of further evidence it has generally been assumed that Norwegian chieftains had been the driving force behind the promotion of the royal cult. It is only logical to infer that they may have realised the cult's potential propaganda value in their opposition to Danish rule.²² However, it should be noted, that *Heimskringla* is the only source, which mentions Einar's involvement in the cult. True, In the *Legendary saga* he attends the elevation and memorably insults Álfifa when she shows disrespect during the testing of the relics by fire.²³ But in this particular account neither the participation of Bishop Grímkell nor that of Einar is needed for securing the *elevatio*: St Ólafr prompts this undertaking himself when his coffin arises twice out of the ground. Snorri's account of Einar þambarskelfir's role in the canonization process cannot be divorced from the chieftain's disappointment at not being granted more authority by King Canute's substitute rulers in Norway.²⁴ This prepares the reader for Einar's later role, as the leader of the chieftains' opposition against Danish rule. In short, Snorri Sturluson places the *translatio* of St Ólafr within a political context, which is largely absent in the older sources.²⁵ About the cult of St Ólafr as the creation of "nationalist chieftains" *Heimskringla*'s account tells us nothing.

One would expect Norwegian sources of the twelfth century, or works composed in Norway, to make the most of a tradition which emphasised the input of indigenous chieftains in the establishment of the cult. This, however, is not the case. Thus Theodoricus monachus gives Grímkell all the credit for the translation and Einar Skúlason, in his poem *Geisli* (c. 1152), proceeds directly from Ólafr's posthumous miracles to the reign of his son, Magnús góði (1035–1047).²⁶ Indeed not only are these sources silent on the involvement of Einar

²¹ Further on this see Haki Antonsson 2003, pp. 143–145.

²² Hoffmann 1975, p. 61. Klaniczay 2002, p. 98. Rainford 1996, p. 78.

²³ *Olafs saga hins helga*, p. 206.

²⁴ "Einarr minntisk þess, er Knútr hafði heitit honum jarldómi yfir Noregi, ok svá þat, konungr efndi ekki heit sín. Einarr varð fyrstr til þess ríkismanna at halda upp helgi Ólafs konungs". *Heimskringla* II, p. 402.

²⁵ Also pointed out, albeit with somewhat different emphasis, in Røthe 2004, pp. 200–214.

²⁶ *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae*, pp. 43–44. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I, pp. 459–462.

þambarskelfir or other Norwegian secular figures in the *elevatio*, but they also glide over the part played by King Sven. Considering the testimonies of *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna* and the *Legendary saga* one must ask whether Theodoricus and Einar Skúlason chose to ignore King Sven's involvement. A "censorship" of this sort is hardly surprising. One namely wonders whether the fact that a member of the Danish royal dynasty had been the first king to promote Ólafr's sanctity would not have represented a potential source of embarrassment for Norwegian authors in the second half of the twelfth century.

If the role of the Norwegian chieftains (i.e. Einar þambarskelfir) is suspect, it could also be argued that Snorri's version is also untrustworthy as it relates to the involvement of Sven and Álfifa. *Glælognskviða*, a skaldic poem of ten strophes,²⁷ composed by the Icelander Þórarinn loftunga, is the one near-contemporary source that associates the former (and by implication the latter) with the cult of St Ólafr.²⁸ Snorri informs us that Þórarinn had been in the service of Sven and had composed *Glælognskviða* in his honour while the king was still in Norway. If this information is taken at face value the poem should be dated to sometime between 1031 and 1035; that is, shortly after the canonization.²⁹

In the first strophe the poet simply tells that King Sven Álfifuson came to Norway with his retinue and praise is bestowed on the Danes who helped secure his rule in the country. The second stanza states that a king ("*þjóðkonungr*") has now established himself in Trondheim and from this place the generous ruler will govern his realm. Whether *þjóðkonungr* refers here to Sven or St Ólafr is open to interpretation. In the following strophes the attention shifts from the young king to the various supernatural signs that have testified to his sanctity. The body of the saint is still incorrupt, his hair and nails grow as though he was alive and bells miraculously chime on their own accord. People flock to the place where he rests; the blind gain sight and the dumb gain speech. In strophe nine Þórarinn directly addresses the receiver of the poem and expresses the hope that Ólafr will allow him to rule the land because only through the saint (and thus ultimately through God) can he secure peace and prosperity for the kingdom.

²⁷ The original poem may, of course, have been longer. Mortensen and Mundal 2003, p. 355.

²⁸ *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I, pp. 324–327.

²⁹ *Heimskringla* II, p. 406.

Although *Glælognskviða* is a short and incompletely-preserved poem, it paints a picture of a surprisingly developed cult. The shrine is already a centre of pilgrimage, a set of miracles is in place and, more strikingly, the notion of Norway as the preserve of St Ólafr has already emerged. In fact the mature state of the cult at such an early point in time has led one commentator, Staffan Hellberg, to question the early dating of *Glælognskviða*.³⁰ In the most detailed published examination of the work since Halvard Magerøy's monograph of 1948,³¹ Hellberg argues that the first strophe of the poem, where King Sven is mentioned, stems from another, now lost, skaldic poem which is unrelated to the following nine verses. In support of this hypothesis Hellberg draws attention to the curious structure of the work. *Glælognskviða* begins in the typical manner of a laudatory skaldic poem. The subject, King Sven, is addressed and one would expect an account of his, admittedly somewhat meagre, martial achievements to ensue. Instead the bulk of the work deals with St Ólafr and his supernatural power. Moreover, Hellberg maintains that although Þórarinn loftunga may have fathered the first stanza of *Glælognskviða*, Snorri was mistaken when he assumed that it went together with the following nine stanzas. If correct, both the dating of the poem and Sven Álfifuson's association with the cult of Ólafr are thrown into doubt. This in turn opens up the possibility that strophes 2–10 were composed on the occasion of later translations of St Ólafr's relics which took place in the reigns of Magnús góði (1035–1047), Haraldr harðráði (1046–1066) and Ólafr kyrri (1066–1093). Hellberg argues that the canonization of King Ólafr was undertaken on the sole initiative of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics who had supported the king in his missionary efforts. The appearance of King Sven in this context in *Heimskringla* is undeniably curious considering that his father, King Canute, was instrumental in bringing about Ólafr's downfall. In further support of this possible scenario it can be noted that Adam of Bremen in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* does not refer to King Sven in relation to St Ólafr's cult. Considering that King Sven Estridssen of Denmark, a kinsman of Sven Álfifuson,³² was an important source for Adam's account, one would expect a reference

³⁰ Hellberg 1984, pp. 14–48.

³¹ Magerø 1948. See also Lange 1958, pp. 113–120. For a thorough examination of the poem see also Rainford 1995, pp. 72–115.

³² Sven Estridssen was a nephew of King Canute.

to that effect. This is particularly true as Adam of Bremen goes out of his way to describe Haraldr harðráði's negative stance towards the cult, even accusing Ólafr's brother of confiscating offerings which pilgrims had brought to the saint.³³

But Hellberg's hypothesis leaves questions unanswered regarding both the history of the cult in the early 1030s and the perceptions of Norwegians and Icelandic writers in the late twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries.³⁴ Certainly it fits uneasily with the description in *Heimskringla* of Sven's involvement in the canonization of 1031. Even if Snorri mistakenly associated the whole poem with the king, it is difficult to imagine how this on its own could have induced him to fabricate an account of the *translatio*. The detail in which it is described—especially the trial of Ólafr's hair by fire and Álfifa's objections to his sanctity—suggests that Snorri was familiar with a tradition that was independent of *Glælognskviða*. More significantly, it should be noted that *Fagrskinna* and the *Legendary saga* also tell that King Sven and Álfifa attended the canonization. Both are probably works of Norwegian origin and as such their authors would have little incentive to create or sustain a tradition regarding Danish involvement in the official establishment of Ólafr's cult. In addition a detail of *Glælognskviða* indicates that the poem was composed not long after Ólafr's death and prior to the enshrinement of his relics.³⁵ Stanza six tells that the saints' body rests on "*borðveggs . . . sæing*" ("a plank-wall bed"), i.e. that it was kept in a wooden coffin which contrasts with the (later) "*gollit skrin*" ("gilded shrine") referred to in *Sighvatr's Erfdrápa* composed c. 1040.

It is noteworthy that Sven's apparent patronage of a cult of a "political enemy" has a certain parallel in the English scene in the second half of the tenth century and the first half of the eleventh century. Thus his father, King Canute, promoted the cult of St Edmund of East Anglia (d. 869), the victim of a Danish war-band, along with the cults of other Anglo-Saxon saints. Canute's policy in this matter has generally been seen as an effort on his part to bridge

³³ *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, xvii, pp. 159–160.

³⁴ Else Mundal has pointed out that although there is no proof that the poem, as it now stands, was dedicated to Sven, this would accord well with the fact that Þórarinn composed another poem, *Togdrápa* (c. 1028), in honour of Canute, the king's father. Mundal 1997, p. 99. To this can be added his (perhaps slightly) earlier *Hofudlausn*.

³⁵ Mortensen and Mundal 2003, p. 356.

the cultural and political divide between the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons.³⁶ Considering the surprisingly early spread of Ólafr's cult to England it is by no means unlikely that Canute's dynasty promoted the sanctity of his former enemy.³⁷ Also worth mentioning in this context is the cult of Edward the Martyr who was treacherously murdered in 978/79 on a visit to his stepmother. Although the involvement in the killing of his successor, Æthelred II, was never established the murder still cast a shadow over his reign. It has been argued that Æthelred promoted the cult of his murdered brother in order to pacify his opponents and ingratiate himself in their eyes,³⁸ a hypothesis, however, which has not found favour with all commentators.³⁹ From this perspective King Sven's patronage of the cult can be seen as an effective way of neutralising opposition from those who may have used Ólafr's saintly reputation as a weapon against the Danish king.⁴⁰

Although there seems little reason to question King Sven Álfifu-son's role in the canonization of Ólafr Haraldsson, it was first in the reigns of Magnús Ólafsson and Haraldr Sigurðarson—the martyr's son and half-brother respectively—that the royal authority began to take an active interest in the promotion of his cult. It was probably the former king who probably stipulated that the saint's feast day should be kept in Norway on July 29th, the day of his martyrdom.⁴¹ At least in Snorri Sturluson's time there was a tradition which strongly associated these three kings with Ólafr's cult:

Magnús konungr Ólafsson lét gera Ólafskirkju í Kaupangi. Í þeim stað hafði náttsett verit lík konungs. Þat var þá fyrir ofan bæinn. Hann lét þar ok reisa konungsgarðinn. Kirkjan varð eigi algör, áðr konungr andaðisk. Lét Haraldr konungr fylla þat, er á skorti. Hann lét ok efna þar í garðinum at gera sér steinhöll, ok varð hún eigi algör, áðr hann lét reisa af grundvelli Mariukirkju uppi á melinum, nær því er heilagr

³⁶ Ridyard 1988, pp. 226–234.

³⁷ Townend 2005. Siward, Canute's earl in Northumbria, dedicated an important church in York to the Norwegian saint. The dedications of at least four churches in London to St Ólafr could also be linked to the presence of Canutes' troops.

³⁸ Brooks 1978, p. 126. Rollason 1983, pp. 17–21.

³⁹ Ridyard 1988, pp. 154–171. Most recently, Simon Keynes has made a good case for linking Æthelred's promotion of Edward's cult with his foundation and patronage of the abbey of Cholsey in Berkshire in the 990s. Keynes 1999 A, p. 34.

⁴⁰ For a comparable use of saints' cults in the Carolingian world, see Fouracre and Gerberding 1996, pp. 46–47.

⁴¹ *Heimskringla* III, pp. 20–21. Snorri appears to have read this meaning from Sighvatr's *Eyfirdrápa*.

dómr konungsins lá í jörðu inn fyrsta vetr eptir fall hans. Þat var mikit musteri ok gørt sterkliga at líminu, svá at varla fékk brotit, þá er Eysteinn erkibyskup lét ofan taka. Heilagr dómr Ólafs konungs var varðveittr í Ólafskirkju, meðan Máriukirkja var í gørð. Haraldr konungr lét húsa konungsgarð ofan frá Máriukirkju við ána, þar sem nú er. En þar, sem hann hafði hollina látit gera, lét hann vígja hús þat til Grégóriúskirkju.⁴²

King Magnus Olafson built Olaf's church in Kaupangen, on the spot where Olaf's body was set down for the night, and which, at that time, was above the town. He also had the king's house built there. The church was not quite finished when the king died; but King Harald had what was wanting completed. There, beside the house, he began to construct a stone hall, but it was not finished when he died. King Harald had the church called Maria Kirke built from the foundations up, at the sand-hill close to the spot where the king's holy remains were concealed in the earth the first winter after his fall. It was a large minster, and so strongly built with lime that it was difficult to break it when the archbishop Eysteinn had it pulled down. Olaf's holy remains were kept in Olaf's church while Maria kirke was being built. King Harald had the king's house erected below Maria Kirke, at the side of the river, where it now is; and he had the house in which he had made the great hall consecrated, and called Gregorius Church.⁴³

Here Snorri recounts a tradition that King Magnús góði promoted the cult of King Ólafr by erecting a church in his honour at the location where the saint's body had been kept following the battle, a site which one must assume served as an early focal point for the cult. The passage also implies that Magnús had Ólafr's corporal relics translated from St Clement's church, where it had been kept since the canonization, to a new church dedicated to the saint. In addition we are told, albeit indirectly, that another translation had taken place in the reign of Haraldr harðráði, on this occasion to a new church dedicated to Virgin Mary. Snorri makes it clear that Magnús and Haraldr associated their own seat of power with the centre of Ólafr's cult, the shrine. The former, we are told, began the building of a royal residence near the martyr's church, an undertaking that was continued and extended by his successor.⁴⁴

⁴² *Heimskringla* III, p. 121. King Ólafr kyrri's translation of Ólafr's relics is also mentioned in *Agrip. Agrip af Noregskonungasögum. Fagrskinna-Nöregskonunga-tal*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson. Íslensk fornrit 29 (Reykjavík, 1985), p. 40.

⁴³ *Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla. Part Two. Sagas of the Norse Kings*, tr. by Samuel Laing. Revised with introd. and notes by Peter Foote (London/Melbourne/Toronto, 1961), pp. 189–190.

⁴⁴ Christophersen 1992, pp. 61–62.

Trondheim was only just emerging as a center of urbanization in the first decades of Ólafr's cult. Although excavations have shown that there was a longstanding settlement at the site of the medieval town of Trondheim,⁴⁵ evidence for urbanization proper can only be detected from the early eleventh century onwards.⁴⁶ The conservative nature of the Trøndelag region is emphasized in the Kings' sagas. This is the area of Norway over which the southern kings first extended (at least) nominal authority at the end of the tenth century (commencing with Ólafr Tryggvason). Prior to this, Trøndelag had been the heartland of the earls of Hlaðir whose close association with paganism is, for instance, attested in Einar skálaglamm's skaldic poem *Vellekla*. It was clearly in the interest of the kings to establish a center of power in the region of Trøndelag: in particular, an urban center like Trondheim could function as a counterweight against deep-rooted patterns of local authority. The promotion by the royal power of Trondheim as the center of Ólafr's cult must be seen within this context.

For Magnús, and Haraldr in particular, it is likely that the cult was important in enhancing Norwegian identity vis-à-vis their two main opponents: the Danish king and (in the case of Haraldr) the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen. As noted, Haraldr was determined to exert his control over ecclesiastical matters within Norway. Hence his policy of fending off German influence in the form of Hamburg-Bremen which at this point in time was in close contact with the Danish king, Sven Estridssen.⁴⁷ For Haraldr the popular cult of St Ólafr would not only have enhanced his legitimacy as king, but also provided him with a religious platform and prestige, which aided him in his standoff with Hamburg-Bremen. If the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen referred to the glorious precedent of Ansgar in its claim to ecclesiastical overlordship in Scandinavia, he could point to his intimate association with the first cult of a native saint in the region. All this may account for Adam of Bremen's hostile tone when he tells of King Haraldr's sacrilegious treatment of Ólafr's cult. Having described Trondheim as an important centre of pilgrimage, Adam discredits Haraldr's association with the cult of his half-brother:

⁴⁵ Sognness 1998, pp. 316–335.

⁴⁶ Christophersen and Nordeide 1994, pp. 274–280. Christophersen 1994, pp. 95–108.

⁴⁷ On this, see for example Johnsen 1968, pp. 11–26.

Videbat haec ille derelictus a Deo, nihilque compunctus oblationes quoque ac tesauros, qui summa fidelium devotione collati sunt ad tumulum fratris, ipse Haroldus unca manu corrodens militibus dispersit. Pro quibus causis archiepiscopus zelo Dei tactus legatos suos direxit ad eundem regem, tyrannicas presumptiones eius litteris increpans. . . .⁴⁸

Although this man whom God had forsaken beheld these wonders, he was nothing moved. With clawed hands this Harold grasped at and dispersed to his henchmen the offerings, and in particular the treasure, which the supreme devotion of the faithful had collected at his brother's tomb. For these reasons the archbishop, inflamed with zeal for God, sent his legates to the king, rebuking him by letter for his tyrannical presumption.⁴⁹

In addition, it hardly needs stressing that the geographical closeness between the shrine of St Ólafr and the royal residence was intended as a symbolic statement of authority. By identifying in such a manner with the corporal relics of a saintly kinsman and forerunner, both King Haraldr harðráði and King Magnús góði, like their Anglo-Saxon counterparts,⁵⁰ strengthened their own personal claim to rulership as well as that of their dynasty. Obviously English missionaries, Bishop Grímkell most notably, were instrumental in both establishing and promoting Ólafr's cult. From their homeland they brought the necessary liturgical and organisational framework without which a cult of this nature could not thrive. It is no co-incidence that in the oldest preserved *officium* of St Ólafr, found in an English manuscript from c. 1060, two prayers are adopted directly from the liturgy on St Oswald and St Edmund, two of the more popular Anglo-Saxon royal saints.⁵¹

The earliest stage of St Ólafr's cult can also be viewed from a different perspective, namely by considering the possibility of an influence from the principality of Rus', where the cults of the Kievan saints Boris and Gleb emerged in the fourth decade of the eleventh century. Following the death of Vladimir I in 1015, a power struggle ensued between his numerous sons (which had been begotten by nearly as many women).⁵² One of them, Prince Sviatopolk of Turov, occupied the throne and immediately took steps to secure his position

⁴⁸ *Magistri Adam Bremensis* III, 27, pp. 159–160.

⁴⁹ *The History of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen*, pp. 127–128.

⁵⁰ Rollason 1986, pp. 91–103.

⁵¹ Hohler 1972, pp. 39–47.

⁵² Franklin and Shephard 1996, pp. 183–207. Vernadsky 1948, pp. 74–83.

by eliminating possible contenders among his nearest relatives. For this purpose he recruited assassins to murder his rivals, among them the young princes Boris and Gleb. However, in 1019 another of Vladimir's sons, Jaroslav of Novgorod, ousted Sviatopolk himself. Jaroslav and the fifth brother, Mstislav, shared the Kievan realm until 1036 when the former finally assumed sole rulership and began promoting the cult of the murdered brothers.⁵³

The possible Rus' influence on Ólafr's cult has been little explored. Erich Hoffmann, for instance, is silent on the subject although he rightly emphasizes the manifold ecclesiastical and political links between Norway and England in this period.⁵⁴ Likewise in a volume of papers on St Ólafr and his cult the possible eastern connection is not even touched upon.⁵⁵ This state of affairs may seem surprising considering that similarities between the Norwegian cult and that of Boris and Gleb have not escaped the attention of scholars in the field of Rus' studies. They, however, have argued that it was the Norwegian cult that inspired Grand-Duke Jaroslav to promote the sanctity of his half-brothers, Boris and Gleb.⁵⁶ From my perspective the opposite route of influence is just as plausible.

As noted, King Ólafr spent a part of his time in exile at the court of Jaroslav. When Ólafr returned to Norway he left behind his young son Magnús who stayed there until 1035 when he was escorted back to Norway to succeed his father on the throne. Haraldr Sigurðarson also had had dealings with the Rus' court. The Old Norse sources tell that he became a high-ranking figure in Jaroslav's army and it is known that he participated in the Byzantine expedition to Sicily as a member of the Russo-Varangian corps.⁵⁷ Haraldr then married Elisabeth (or Ellizif) c. 1044, the daughter of the grand duke, thus putting a formal seal on ties between the princely dynasties of Norway and Kievan Rus'.⁵⁸ Moreover, the sources indicate that Haraldr was

⁵³ The accepted version of events follows an entry for the year 1015 in the *Laurentian Chronicle*. Lenhoff 1989, p. 12. Another, very different, version of what took place following Vladimir's death is inspired by a somewhat ingenious reading of the Icelandic short saga (*þáttur*) of Eymundur Hringsson. According to this theory, generally dismissed by scholars of Kievan Rus', it was Jaroslav himself who orchestrated the killing of Boris and Gleb. On this theory see Cook 1986, pp. 65–89.

⁵⁴ Hoffmann 1975, pp. 58–89.

⁵⁵ Svahnström (ed.) 1981.

⁵⁶ Sciacca 1983, pp. 58–60. Klaniczay 2002, p. 132.

⁵⁷ A convenient overview of Haraldr's career in the East is provided by Koht 1931, pp. 463–469. See also Sigfús Blöndal 1978, pp. 54–103.

⁵⁸ See Birnbaum 1978, pp. 5–25.

at the court of Jaroslav on two separate occasions. He probably arrived in 1031 and stayed for a few years. In the early 1040s he was back and then returned to Norway in 1045.⁵⁹ In other words, when Haraldr came to power in Norway 1046 one would expect him to have been better acquainted with the Kievan and the Byzantine models of kingship than, for instance, that of Anglo-Saxon England.

Haraldr's familiarity with the political scene in the East has led scholars to speculate in what manner this could have influenced his political outlook.⁶⁰ Particular attention has been paid to his uncompromising stance towards outside interference in ecclesiastical matters, most succinctly expressed in his dealings with Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen in the 1050s. The argument has been put forward that Haraldr had been influenced by the eastern concept of omnipotent kingship and the right of the secular ruler to control the Church.⁶¹ His interest in extending his rule over Denmark has also been seen as an attempt to establish a principality in the Russian or Byzantine mould which would have left him in control of a sizable portion of the trade between Western Europe and the East.⁶² In light of these, admittedly not always convincing, speculations it is surely justifiable to place Haraldr's patronage of his half-brother's sanctity within a similar eastern context, particularly as his reign from 1046 to 1066 was certainly a crucial period in the cult's development.

The emergence of the cult of Boris and Gleb is a much-debated subject in Old Rus' studies.⁶³ In some ways the student in this field is confronted with problems not unlike those relating to the origin of St Ólaf's cult. In both cases he faces the task of explaining how a princely cult could emerge and thrive in a newly converted society; a society, moreover, where ecclesiastical organization was still in an embryonic form under the tutelage of a secular authority that

⁵⁹ *Heimskringla* III, p. 69. *Morkinskinna*, pp. 56, 87–88. For these dates see Birnbaum 1978, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Joys 1948, pp. 37–38. Johnsen 1968, pp. 11–16. Ciggaar 1996, pp. 116–128. On King Haraldr and the possible ecclesiastical influence in Norway from Greek Orthodoxy, see Hagland 1997.

⁶¹ Joys 1948, pp. 37–38.

⁶² Andersen 1995, p. 165.

⁶³ See Lenhoff's overview (Lenhoff 1989, pp. 11–16). Due to linguistic reasons a large part of the scholarly literature on the cult of Boris and Gleb has been inaccessible to me. However, as a result of the distinct lack of interest shown by Soviet scholars in hagiography and saints' cults, this is not the serious handicap one might expect. To put the scholarly literature on Boris and Gleb into perspective see Franklin 1994, pp. 250–275.

had only recently embraced Christianity. It is accepted by most scholars that it was Grand-Duke Jaroslav who began promoting the cult of Boris and Gleb in the 1020s, an interpretation primarily based on the so-called *Narrative, Passion and Encomium of Boris and Gleb* and other hagiographic texts from the eleventh and twelfth century.⁶⁴ While Sviatopolk, the murderer of the two princes, was still in power the corporal remains of the brothers were neglected. However, pillars of fire and burning candles at the sites testified to their saintly status and when Jaroslav had ousted Sviatopolk from the principality "he began to inquire about the bodies of the saintly ones, how and where they were placed".⁶⁵ Jaroslav buried them with appropriate honours and immediately miracles began to occur. When the grand duke heard of this he

... praised God and the holy martyrs; he then summoned the Metropolitan and joyfully told him. Hearing this, the Archbishop lifted his praise to the Lord, and gave the Prince good and pious counsel, that he should build a church of surpassing beauty and holiness. The advice pleased the Prince, and he erected a great church with five cupolas, decorated throughout with frescoes, and he adorned it with all manners of finery. And the Metropolitan John and Prince Jaroslav and the entire clergy and the people came with crosses, and they translated the saints and consecrated the church. And they established the twenty-fourth of the month of July as a feast day for celebration. It is the day on which the most blessed Boris was slain; and on that the very day the church was consecrated and the saints were translated.⁶⁶

This passage, which was written sometime between the latter part of Jaroslav's reign to the mid twelfth century,⁶⁷ describes a canonization jointly overseen by the metropolitan and the grand duke in the year 1039. Thus when Haraldr harðráði visited Jaroslav in 1042 the promotion of the cults of Boris and Gleb had already commenced. In passing it is worth observing that the church mentioned in the passage was erected at the burial-site of Boris and Gleb⁶⁸ and, as

⁶⁴ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, pp. 97–117. "Most scholars believe that the cult developed in the 1020s, soon after Jaroslav became sole ruler in Kiev...". *Ibid.*, p. xxvii. On the hagiographic sources see *ibid.*, xxvi–lvii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 120–121. This is a passage from the so-called *Tale of the Miracles of the Holy Passion Sufferers of Christ Roman and David*. See also *ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

⁶⁷ See Ingham 1983, p. 229.

⁶⁸ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, p. xxvi.

noted earlier, Haraldr had a church built close to the site where Ólafr had lain the year following his death at Stiklastaðir.

A text also describes a translation of the martyrs in the year 1072 into a new church dedicated to them in Vyshegorod, the site of their grave and a princely residence some ten kilometres north of Kiev.⁶⁹ Jaroslav's three sons had organized this official canonization and present on this occasion were the most eminent representatives of the Rus' Church. The immediate incentive for this undertaking appears to have been the re-conquering of Kiev by one of the brothers, Prince Izjaslav. Most historians have seen this second translation as reflecting the brothers' wish to show their gratitude to Boris and Gleb for their aid in ousting Prince Vseslav of Polotsk (a member of another line of the ruling dynasty) from Kiev.⁷⁰ The event can also be viewed as a symbolic manifestation of the unity of the Kievan principality at a time when it had effectively been divided up between the heirs of Jaroslav. Interestingly, King Ladislaus of Hungary (1077–95) was in Kiev in 1072 when the translation took place and it has been suggested that his experience inspired him to canonize King Stephen in 1083. The Hungarian royal dynasty, like that of Norway, had dynastic links with the ruling house of Kievan Rus'.⁷¹

Izjaslav was not the only brother to promote the sanctity of Boris and Gleb. Sviatoslav, the ruler of the important city of Chernigov (1054–1076), was an enthusiastic patron of their cult.⁷² It appears Sviatoslav was the first to promote souvenir amulets of the saints intended for pilgrims and he certainly commenced the building of a church in their honour that, if completed, would have been the largest one in the principality.⁷³ Thus Sviatoslav both identified himself with the martyrs as well as providing the bishopric of Chernigov with a focal point for religious observance.⁷⁴ Indeed the translations of Boris

⁶⁹ Hollingsworth 1999, p. 202.

⁷⁰ *Slavic Lives*, pp. 215–217. Lenhoff 1989, pp. 49, 129. It has been argued that the 1072 event represented the first translation of Boris and Gleb and, accordingly, that the one attributed to Jaroslav and Ioann, the metropolitan, is a later invention. Poppe 1981, pp. 30–38. Reiterated in, *idem* 1994, p. 412 and Poppe, 2003. A detailed study of the *Narrative* and the *Nestor Chronicle*, however, shows that there is scant reason to distrust the testimony of the sources regarding the elevation of 1039. See Müller 1992, pp. 332–339.

⁷¹ Klaniczay 1990, p. 89. *Idem* 2002, p. 133.

⁷² Dimnik 1992, pp. 373–390.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 388–390.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

and Gleb by the successors of Jaroslav can be compared with the translations of Ólafr's relics by Kings Magnús góði, Haraldr harðráði and Ólafr kyrri. These acts further associated their position of power with the cult of their kinsmen.

It cannot of course be conclusively demonstrated that the Kievan cult of Boris and Gleb influenced Haraldr in his promotion of St Ólafr's cult. Still, considering the contacts he had with Grand-Duke Jaroslav during a period when the latter had established himself as the sole ruler of Kievan Rus' and had begun to take an interest in the cults of his half-brothers, such an influence seems more than plausible.⁷⁵ As already observed the Anglo-Saxon contribution to the emergence of the Norwegian cult has been frequently stressed.⁷⁶ The Englishmen working in Norway were familiar with the idea of royal sanctity and the value that such cults could have in strengthening religious life and promoting the ideals of Christian kingship. It is legitimate, however, to ask whether from the royal perspective a closer model for the cult of St Ólafr should not be sought in Kievan Rus', a principality which both Magnús and Haraldr were probably better acquainted with than England.

Around the mid eleventh century Norway and the principality of Kievan Rus' had a number of things in common. To begin with, the existence of the two realms as independent political units in this period was far from stable. The kings of Denmark had since the latter half of the tenth century made territorial claims on Norway while local separatism, headed by powerful magnates, was still a feature of the political scene. In the tenth century the Kievan principality was very much a fragile and ill-defined, although expanding, political identity. In a similar way as the unification of Norway, or rather the notion of a unified Norway, was forged in the reign of the two

⁷⁵ Without claiming that the hagiography of Kievan Rus' influenced that on St Ólafr, it is noteworthy that some of the hagiographic commonplaces associated with the Norwegian saint also appear in the Slavic *Narrative, Passion and Encomium* of Boris and Gleb. For instance, the motif of the pillar of light seen over the grave of many of the Anglo-Saxon royal martyrs (and that of St Ólafr) appears in Rus' hagiography (more specifically as a pillar of fire). See *Medieval Slavic Lives*, p. 193. One motif associated with St Ólafr that I have not encountered in English hagiography is the miraculous appearance of lighted candles at the king's shrine (the earliest reference to this is in *Glelognskviða*). Lighted candles appear over the graves of the Russian martyrs. *Ibid.*, p. 193. Lenhoff 1989, pp. 39–40. See also this motif in relation to Þorleifr breiðskeggr (see ch. 4.5).

⁷⁶ Hoffmann 1975, pp. 58–89. Blom 1981, pp. 27–38. Myking 1998.

missionary kings Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr Haraldsson, the Kievan realm emerged as a relatively compact unit in the reigns of Grand-Dukes Vladimir I (c. 980–1015) and Jaroslav the Wise (1019–1054). Christianity was the cohesive element that these rulers brought to their respective dominions. Although the religion had already gained some headway, the official conversion (that is the adoption of the religion by the secular ruler) of both realms took place in the last decades of the tenth century; with Vladimir in 989 and King Ólafr Tryggvason in 995. In both lands the organisation of the Church was in a rudimentary state and ecclesiastical assistance from abroad was of pivotal importance—from England in the case of Norway and the Byzantine Empire in the case of Rus'. Thus the question of influence apart, the parallels between the cults of Ólafr and the Kievan princes Boris and Gleb are noteworthy. In both cases we see princely cults promoted both in order to strengthen the rule of specific dynasties and provide symbols of unity within emerging, and far from stable, principalities.

3.2. *The Cult of St Hallvard*

The earliest reference to the cult of St Hallvard appears in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Adam writes that King Sven Estridssen of Denmark had informed him that martyrs of the faith were to be found in both Norway and Sweden. Among those was a certain Hericus (Erikr), a missionary, who "won the martyr's crown by having his head cut off while he preached in the farther parts of Sweden".⁷⁷ Although no other source mentions this Hericus, it has been argued, on somewhat dubious grounds, that the Swedish royal cult of King Erik Jedvardson, which emerged in the latter half of the twelfth century, constituted a continuation of the cult of his eleventh-century namesake.⁷⁸ Adam then proceeds to tell of a certain Allwardus (Hallvard), a man of noble birth, who was killed by his own friends in the act of protecting an enemy.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁷ "martyrii palmam capitis abscisione meruit". *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, liiii, p. 199.

⁷⁸ Stjerna 1898, pp. 1–35. Forcefully dismissed by Jansen 1898, pp. 324–325.

⁷⁹ "Alter quidam Alfwardus nomine, inter Nortmannos sancta conversatione diu latenter vivens abscondi non potuit. Ille igitur dum protexit inimicum, occisus est ab amicis. Ad quorum requietionis locum magna hodieque sanitatum miracula populis declarantur". *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, liiii, p. 199.

Norwegians and the Swedes venerate Alwardus and Hericus at their resting place where many miracles have taken place.

In Icelandic annals Hallvard's martyrdom is dated to 1043⁸⁰ and considering Adam's early testimony (c. 1070) there is scant reason to distrust this dating. *Lectiones de S. Halvardo* in three parts appear in the *Breviarium Nidarosiense*, printed in 1519, of which a slightly fuller version (*Legenda*) was printed by the Bollandists in 1680 in *Acta Sanctorum* from a now lost manuscript from Utrecht dating to c. 1300.⁸¹ A Swedish fragment contains an *inventio*—the story of the discovery of Hallvard's corporal remains and attestation of his sanctity—which is not found in the two above mentioned texts.⁸² In addition two fragments of an Icelandic saga or Life of Hallvard have survived.⁸³ The dating of the *Legenda* is unclear although Arne Odd Johnsen has argued, on account of a reference to trial by iron, that it may have been composed as early as the middle of the twelfth century.⁸⁴ A somewhat later date, however, is probably more likely.

The *Legenda* tells that Hallvard was the son of Vébjörn, a rich farmer from the Vestfold region, and that his mother was a certain Þóra, a daughter of Guðbrandr kúla. The family is tied to St Ólafr and thus Hallvard is presented as a member of the Norwegian royal dynasty. In his youth he was diligent, honest and pure of heart. Travelling to another part of the country Hallvard arrived at the banks of the river Dram. A pregnant woman approached him and begged him to help her cross. As Hallvard and the women journeyed across the river they were confronted by three men in a boat. The woman explained that the men wished to punish her for a theft of which she has already proved her innocence by undergoing trial by iron. On hearing this Hallvard refused to hand over the women and consequently both were killed. Hallvard's body was thrown overboard with a stone around its neck but miraculously the corpse floated to the surface. At this point both the *Legenda* and the *lectiones* terminate. One of the Icelandic fragments, however, tells that Hallvard's corporal remains were brought to Oslo shortly afterwards: "*ok hvilir sidan þar*

⁸⁰ *Íslandske annaler*, pp. 17, 58 (which has it 1042), 108, 250.

⁸¹ A fragment of a St Hallvard's legend is also found in a Swedish lectionary from c. 1500. See *Libri Liturgici Provinciae*, p. 422.

⁸² Odenius 1961–62.

⁸³ All three are printed in *Heilagra manna sögur* I, pp. 395–399.

⁸⁴ Johnsen 1949–51, pp. 133–154.

i hofutkirkiu þess kaupstadar, ok vegsamadr sidan af öllu folki sem verdugt er".⁸⁵

There is a notable discrepancy between the brief account in the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* and the later recorded hagiography on Hallvard. To begin with Adam makes a clear connection between his martyrdom, on the one hand, and the less than ideal religious state of Norway, on the other hand. This portrayal of religious life in the country accords well with Adam's negative assessment of King Haraldr harðráði's attitude towards the Church and the Christian religion.⁸⁶ Although he does not explicitly state that Hallvard was killed by pagans in the act of defending Christianity, we are left in no doubt that his murder was committed in a semi-heathen country. As presented by Adam, moreover, St Hallvard shares the fate of those saints who come to a violent end through no fault of their own and, significantly, by the hands of people they trusted. As mentioned, Adam writes that Hallvard was killed by friends (*"occisus est ab amicis"*).

The extant medieval literature on St Hallvard thus partly fits into the hagiographic pattern associated with those princely martyrs who are unjustly killed. Although Hallvard is neither a prince nor a king, his royal pedigree is duly noted. Like many martyrs of that stock his behaviour as a youth is exemplary and his purity in body and noble spirit are stressed. It is worth observing that in medieval pictorial representations St Hallvard and St Magnús are invariably beardless, a feature that underlines their youthfulness and innocence.⁸⁷ Still, one element associated with the hagiography of princely martyrs is absent from the Hallvard corpus: the treacherous betrayal of the main protagonist. Whether the appearance of this element in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* reflects a genuine Norwegian tradition or Adam's interpretation—that is Adam placing the story of Hallvard into a hagiographic framework that he was familiar with—is impossible to tell.⁸⁸

Hallvard's alleged kinship to St Ólafr has led to speculations that King Haraldr harðráði played a leading part in promoting the cult.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Heilagra manna sögur* I, p. 396. "and [he] rests in the main church of that town and is venerated, as is fitting, by all people". My own translation.

⁸⁶ *Adam of Bremen*, III, xvii (16), pp. 127–128.

⁸⁷ Blindheim 1988, p. 168.

⁸⁸ For a comparison of Adam's reference and the *Legenda* see Seierstad 1946.

⁸⁹ Of course the possibility cannot be ruled out that this tradition emerged at a later stage.

As far as I have been able to establish P. A. Munch was the first to mention this possibility and Halvdan Koht later included his idea in an entry on the king in *Norsk biografisk leksikon*.⁹⁰ Munch pointed out that Oslo was the centre of Hallvard's cult, a town that Haraldr had founded according to saga tradition.⁹¹ Just as St Ólafr's relics provided a focal point for Christianity in the region of Trøndelag, so Haraldr may have envisaged a similar role for St Hallvard in Oslo and the surrounding area. By translating Hallvard from Lier region to Oslo the king would have had cults of his kinsmen placed in the two most important regions of his realm, Trøndelag in the north and Viken in the southwest. More recently Olav Tveito has presented a similar argument with an added emphasis on the potential missionary role that the cult could have played in the Viken region.⁹²

In the second half of the eleventh century Oslo was emerging as main population centre in Viken and the principal market place in southern Norway.⁹³ Snorri Sturluson attributes the foundation of the town to Haraldr harðráði around the middle of the eleventh century. However, excavations have revealed traces of a settlement from at least as early as the turn of the millennium. Most notably archaeological evidence shows that around this time a *graffar-kirkja*, a church with burial rights, had been built in the location.⁹⁴ Indeed there have been speculations that the earliest phase in the emergence of Oslo was started by the Danish royal authority towards the end of the tenth century in order to secure its influence in the Viken region.⁹⁵ However that may be, it is only from the mid-eleventh century onwards that there is clear evidence for royal involvement in the

⁹⁰ Munch 1855, pp. 197–203. Koht 1931, pp. 466–467. Also mentioned by Daae 1879, p. 166.

⁹¹ “*Haraldr konungr lét reisa kaupstað austr í Ósló ok sat þar opt*”. *Heimskringla* III, p. 139.

⁹² Tveito 2006. Tveito speculates that Bishop Grímkell, on his return to Norway, could have been involved in the establishment of the cult.

⁹³ See Nedkvitne and Norseng 1991, pp. 9–75. Helle 1994, pp. 28–32.

⁹⁴ It is generally assumed that the church was dedicated to St Clement although this cannot be established with certainty. If that was the case it has been suggested that the wooden church was a royal foundation similar to the church which King Ólafr Tryggvason is said to have built in Trondheim and dedicated to St Clement. Cinthio 1968, pp. 103–117. Alternatively, the early church may have been a missionary and/or a merchant church of the sort that were dedicated to St Clement in other eleventh-century urban communities in Scandinavia (Trondheim, Lund and Roskilde). Lidén 1972, pp. 90–107. For a useful overview of the early churches of Oslo see Norseng 1997, pp. 109–128, esp. pp. 113–116.

⁹⁵ Schia 1989.

urbanization process. Around this time King Haraldr had a church built which was dedicated to the St Mary,⁹⁶ and work on a royal palace appears also to have begun. Snorri's statement can therefore be modified to the effect that Haraldr did not establish the town of Oslo *ex nihilo* but rather incorporated it into the expanding mechanism of royal power.⁹⁷ Here the strategic significance of Oslo's location must be taken into consideration. Not only is the town placed in a region particularly susceptible to Danish influence but it could also function as a centre of both land and water communication routes.⁹⁸ Thus in the reign of Haraldr Sigurðarson there was an ecclesiastical framework in place in Oslo, supported by the royal authority, within which a cult of St Hallvard could have been promoted. Additionally, in Oslo we find the same combination of a "new" royal town and the emergence of a martyr-cult we have encountered in a more explicit manner in Trondheim. Indeed it is difficult to escape the conclusion that King Haraldr, or possibly his son and successor Ólafr kyrri, adopted and promoted the cult of St Hallvard. But it must be stressed that these are speculations and that there is no direct evidence of royal involvement. In fact in the Hallvard Legend no mention is even made of an ecclesiastical input in the establishment of the cult. In this context, however, the partial preservation of the Legend should be remembered.

Fagrskinna, *Heimskringla* and Icelandic annals tell that there was a church in Oslo dedicated St Hallvard c. 1130.⁹⁹ This dedication must have taken place in the first quarter of the twelfth century, that is, not long after the bishop of Oslo took up permanent residence in the town (c. 1100). Prior to this development the bishop had made use of existing churches in or near the town. It is noteworthy that St Hallvard's was modelled on the Romanesque cathedrals of Europe and there can little doubt that from the start it was intended to serve as an episcopal residence.¹⁰⁰ The cult of St Hallvard can

⁹⁶ Andersen 1974, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Snorri Sturluson gives every Norwegian king, from Ólafr Tryggvason to Ólafr kyrri, the credit for the establishing one significant town. Schia 1989, pp. 51–73.

⁹⁸ Andersen 1995, p. 154.

⁹⁹ "*Hann* [i.e. King Sigurðr the Crusader] *var jarðaðr at Hallvarðskirkju, lagðr í steinvegginn útar frá kórinum syðra megin*". *Heimskringla* III, p. 276. *Fagrskinna*, p. 348. *Íslandske annaler*, pp. 120, 180, 329.

¹⁰⁰ Nedkvitne and Norseng 1991, p. 21. It has been argued that the church mentioned was the first one to keep the shrine of St Hallvard. Andersen 1974, p. 21.

therefore be seen as another example of a native princely cult, which began at a local (and in most cases) popular level,¹⁰¹ and was adopted by a bishopric at an important stage in its development. A similar pattern can be observed in the cases of the cults of St Magnús and St Rögnvaldr in Orkney, St Knud in Odense, St Sunniva in Bergen, St Erik in Uppsala and, of course, St Ólafr in Nidaros.

* * *

There seems scant reason to reject the saga tradition that an English bishop with the support of a Danish king first officially promoted the cult of King Ólafr Haraldsson. Only at a later stage did the Norwegian kings identify their own rule with their saintly kinsman. In the eleventh century the rudimentary organisation of the Norwegian Church, still in its missionary phase, ensured that the royal power appropriated the cult for its own purposes. The early establishment of a proper framework for the royal cult and the assurance with which the Norwegian kings took political advantage of it can be explained by the familiarity of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries with cults of this nature and, possibly, the influence that the Kievan cults of Boris and Gleb exerted on King Haraldr harðráði. The brief, and at first sight surprising, involvement of King Sven Álfifuson in Ólafr's canonization suggests that Bishop Grímkell, and the clergy in his entourage, were not able, or were unwilling, to establish a cult on an official basis without royal sanction and patronage. Only with the establishment of an episcopal seat in Nidaros in the reign of Ólafr kyrri (1066–1093) can we assume that the Church began to appropriate, or rather re-appropriate, the cult of St Ólafr for its own pur-

This argument is based on a somewhat narrow interpretation of the sentence, "*Ad quorum requietionis locum magna hodie que sanitatum miracula populis declarantur*". This observation appears to be supported by the fact that Adam of Bremen does not mention a church serving as the focal point for Hallvard's cult. Rather he states that people sought miracles at the site of his grave. *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, iiiii, p. 199. But Adam is referring here to both Erik and Hallvard and "*requietionis*" does not rule out the possibility that the latter's resting place was of a more formal nature than Andersen assumes. It is worth noting that even when Adam refers to the shrine of St Ólafr he is rather vague: "*Cuius egregia merita testantur haec miracula, quae cotidie fiunt ad sepulcrum regis in civitate Trondemnis*". *Ibid.*, III, xvii, p. 159. In short, Adam's testimony does not answer the question whether St Hallvard had been translated to a church by the time *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* was written.

¹⁰¹ Knapskog emphasises the popular origins of the cult in the Lier region. Knapskog 1999, pp. 46–48.

pose. A comparable pattern can perhaps also be detected in relation to the cult of St Hallvard in Oslo which may have been established by King Haraldr Sigurðarson in the late 1040s or the 1050s but certainly had become the preserve of the bishop of Oslo in the early twelfth century.

3.3. *The Danish Princely Cults: St Knud of Odense and St Knud Lavard*

St Knud of Odense

The question why the Jutlanders rose in revolt against King Knud IV, and finally slew him in the church of St Albans in Odense in the year 1086, has been a matter of long-standing debate, although it is generally assumed that the onerous burden which Knud's planned invasion of England had placed on the shoulders of his subjects was a key factor in turning the wrath of the populace against him.¹⁰²

Passio sancti Kanuti regis et martiris, composed sometime between 1095 and 1100, Aelnoth of Canterbury's *Gesta Svenomagni* (c. 1120) and the so-called *Tabula Othiniensis* (1095), are the most important sources on the origins of Knud's cult.¹⁰³ The first-mentioned work makes it clear that it was the clerical community of the town that undertook the *elevatio* of the king in 1095, encouraged by the general population and some unidentified "*episcopis et sacerdotibus*".¹⁰⁴ An interesting feature relating to this earliest stage of the cult appears in the *Tabula Othiniensis*, a copper plate that was made to commemorate this occasion.¹⁰⁵ The plate's inscription shows that although Knud was meant to be the centre of veneration, the Odense clergy also extended the crown of martyrdom to the king's brother, Benedict, and seventeen other (named) retainers.¹⁰⁶ Thus the ecclesiastics that organised the

¹⁰² Skovgaard-Petersen 1977, pp. 246–248. For an overview and assessment of Knud's reign see Hoffmann 1974, pp. 529–570.

¹⁰³ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 62–71, 77–136.

¹⁰⁴ "*Hijz mox diuulgatis Iutenses cum episcopis et sacerdotibus admodum religiosi ad nos fide bona et deuotione uenerunt, consilium una nobiscum inierunt, et in eo decreuerunt, ut ossa regis et martiris cum digno honore eleuari debuerunt*". *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–62.

¹⁰⁶ "*Qui omnes sicut dei gratia cum suo rege ac domino socii passionum martyrii fuerunt. ita consolationis et premii cum eo consortes merito erunt*". *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

elevation of 1095 were not exclusively thinking in terms of a cult which focussed on King Knud; they also chose to include those who had died in his defence.

This extension of martyrdom to Knud's retainers provides an insight into the impetus behind the establishment of the cult. The inclusion of Knud's brave followers can be interpreted as a potent expression of the sacrosanct nature of Christian kingship. The killing of a king—the patron and protector of both Church and Christianity—was a sacrilegious act and those who sacrificed their life in his defence received their just reward in the afterlife. Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine such a sentiment striking a chord in a society that valued highly heroic death and loyalty in the face of overwhelming odds.¹⁰⁷ In the words of one commentator the cult “in a wider perspective contributed to a more permanent state of security for the clergy in Danish society by criminalizing rebellion against the royal protector of the Church”.¹⁰⁸ A similar argument has been made regarding the Anglo-Saxon princely martyr-cults. David Rollason has pointed out that in the wake of a papal legatine mission to England in 786, which promulgated a strong condemnation of royal murder, men of the Church became increasingly interested in cults of this nature. In other words, the promotion of a cult of a slain prince could further an ecclesiastical agenda that countered regicide.¹⁰⁹ If the ecclesiastics of Odense were of English origin, as is often assumed but by no means proven, they were undoubtedly conscious of this dimension to the cult of King Knud and his retainers.

The *elevatio* of Knud IV took place in the spring of 1095 while King Olaf hunger, his brother and successor, was still in power. However, neither the *Gesta Svenomagni* nor the *Passio* mention Olaf in connection with this event. The thirteenth-century *Knyttlinga saga* contains a tradition of unknown derivation that presents Olaf as sceptical, even hostile, to Knud's saintly reputation. The king, on a visit to the island of Fyn, is informed by a priest of St Albans that a light can sometimes be seen over Knud's grave and that other

¹⁰⁷ On the loyalty of Knud's retainers in the context of Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature see Frank 1991, pp. 95–107, esp. pp. 104–105.

¹⁰⁸ Breengaard 1982, p. 329 (English summary). For his general interpretation of Knud's cult, see *ibid.*, pp. 122–149.

¹⁰⁹ Rollason 1983, pp. 11–22. See also in relation to the cult of St Edward, Ridyard 1988, p. 167.

miraculous signs have also occurred at the same location. The priest asks the king whether something should not be done about his brother's apparent holiness. Olaf dismisses this idea out of hand and the saga tells that no one dared to raise this subject again while the king was alive.¹¹⁰ Interestingly the Icelandic author of the saga shows no awareness that Knud's remains had been elevated during Olaf's reign. This is in notable contrast to the *Passio* and the *Gesta Suenomagni* where this event precedes his death and, in a sense, brings it about.¹¹¹

Apart from the fact that King Knud had founded a church in Odense dedicated to St Alban and St Mary and which housed a relic of the proto-martyr, which he had apparently imported from England, precious little is known about the clerical community that oversaw the *elevatio* of 1095. As alluded to earlier there is no concrete evidence that it was a colony of Anglo-Saxon monks¹¹² and thus any English influence in this earliest stage of the cult is difficult to establish with certainty. All we can safely say is that the Odense community consisted of priests which served the church of St Albans. In addition, the episcopal situation in Odense at this point in time is unclear. Although Aelnoth emphasises the central role that Bishop Hubald of Odense played in the canonization of 1100,¹¹³ neither he nor the author of the *Passio* mention that Hubald, or another bishop of the same diocese, stood behind the *elevatio* of 1095. Indeed there is little to support the assumption that Hubald had become bishop of Odense at this early stage,¹¹⁴ and there is even a distinct possibility that the bishopric was vacant.¹¹⁵ In any case the earliest hagiographic work on St Knud (see ch. 1.4) shows that in the eyes of the Odense clergy the king was a martyr for the cause of a fledgling Church that was operating in a society which, from their perspective, held on to outdated values. Knud's cult provided a platform from which these intransigent sentiments could be countered.

¹¹⁰ *Danakonunga sogur*, pp. 204–205.

¹¹¹ “*et nunc deo disponente, facta beati Kanuti martiris translatione exaltationis, euenit huius Olavi depositio terrene dignitatis*”. *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 71, see also *ibid.*, pp. 129–123.

¹¹² For a discussion of the Odense community prior to the arrival of the English monks, see Nyberg 2000, pp. 57–59.

¹¹³ On 1100 as the correct date for Knud's canonization (rather than 1101) see Nyberg, 2001, pp. 13–14.

¹¹⁴ Assumed by King 1966, p. 2. Hoffmann 1994, pp. 285–286. Folz 1984, p. 38. But correctly questioned by Kluger 1992, p. 59.

¹¹⁵ Nyberg 1986, pp. 113–118. King 1962, pp. 148–149.

Following Olaf's death in August of 1095, Erik ejegod, another brother of King Knud, succeeded to the throne. Erik is nowhere associated with Knud's *elevatio* and the idea promulgated by some scholars that he was involved behind the scenes is not backed up by the sources.¹¹⁶ Certainly one would expect such an involvement to be recognised in either Aelnoth's work or the *Passio*. So although the king's later support of the cult is beyond dispute, it would be mistaken to project this development onto the events of 1095; the religious community in Odense was responsible for the earliest recognition of Knud's sanctity. Even Saxo Grammaticus, an ardent admirer of King Erik ejegod, acknowledged the local origin of Knud's cult: "The universal church has consecrated the virtue of his life, and of his miracles, too, which were first revered in private by the Odensers".¹¹⁷

If the *Passio* and the *Gesta Svenomagni* present the elevation of 1095 in terms of local initiative, the latter work also makes it clear that when Erik ejegod came to the throne he immediately began supporting the cult of his brother. The king requested the Benedictine abbey of Evesham in England to supply a community of monks to tend Knud's shrine and in 1095/96, with the approval of King William Rufus, monks from that illustrious foundation arrived in Odense.¹¹⁸ These would not have been strangers to tending royal shrines for their abbey was the centre of the cult of St Wigstan (d. c. 850), a Mercian princely martyr whose relics, like those of St Knud, had been subjected to a trial by fire.¹¹⁹ In addition Erik sent

¹¹⁶ Skovgaard-Petersen 1977, p. 259. This is also (albeit tentatively) suggested by Koch 1950, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ "*Cuius tam vite quam miraculorum virtutem, privatim Othoniensibus venerandam, publica etiam religio consecravit*". Saxo Grammaticus, *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia*. Books X–XVI, vol. I, pp. 88–89.

¹¹⁸ King 1966, pp. 2–3.

¹¹⁹ For the English context to this see Knowles 1963, pp. 163–164. On St Wigstan and Evesham see Hayward 1993, pp. 182–201. It should, however, be noted that the trial by fire was, according to the *Passio*, conducted by the clerical community of Odense as a part of his elevation of 1095, i.e. prior to the arrival of the monks from Evesham. Moreover, as mentioned (see p. 35, footnote no. 131) the testing of relics by fire was by no means an invention of Normans (and their prelates) who were suspicious of Anglo-Saxon saints. Thus the Second Council of Saragossa (592) stipulated that all Arian relics should be authenticated by test of fire and in 1031 Bishop Meinwerk of Paderborn in Saxony ceremoniously laid the relic of St Felix on no less than three separate bonfires before placing it on the high altar. See Snoek 1995, pp. 330–331 and Head 2000. For this ritual in Scandinavia see Haki Antonsson 2006, pp. 154–158.

envoys to Pope Paschal II to argue the case for Knud's sanctity. The pope consented and stipulated that Knud (now re-named Canutus) should be included in the catalogue of the blessed. Then in a solemn ceremony on April 19th 1100, attended by "all the bishops of Denmark and many priests", Bishop Hubald of Odense carried out the official canonization by translating Knud's relics to a new reliquary.¹²⁰ The emergence of the cult of Knud IV can therefore be divided into two stages. In the first stage the ecclesiastical community of Odense elevated in 1095 the king's corporal relics. The second stage commenced with the accession of Erik ejegod to the throne and his subsequent patronage of the cult. It is the second phase rather than the first one that has mainly preoccupied scholars to date.

It has generally been assumed that King Erik promoted the cult of Knud IV in order to add prestige and legitimacy to the Danish royal dynasty.¹²¹ Indeed Erik appears to have been following in the footsteps of his father, Sven Estridssen, whose promotion of the cult of Harald bluetooth in Roskilde is alluded to by Adam of Bremen.¹²² On the other hand Breengaard has pointed out that this interpretation presupposes that Erik's motivations were necessarily similar to those which lay behind King Valdemar's promotion of the cult of his father, Knud Lavard (see below).¹²³ Indeed there are important differences between the two cases. Whereas Valdemar sought papal approval for the canonization of his father in order to add legitimacy to his own rule and his particular branch of the royal dynasty, Erik ejegod appears to have done the same in order to bestow lustre on the Danish royal authority in a broader sense. Erik's succession to the throne, unlike that of Valdemar's, was peaceful and no serious internal opposition to his rule emerged during his reign. That Erik considered his standing in the kingdom secure is shown by the pilgrimage he undertook to Rome in 1098 and later to the Holy Land (on which he died in 1103). Just as Erik's efforts were instrumental in establishing the first Scandinavian archbishopric, that of Lund (in 1103/1104), and hence bringing Denmark nearer to the rest of Christian Europe in ecclesiastical matters, thus the papally-sanctioned canonization of King Knud could not but enhance the standing of

¹²⁰ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 132–134.

¹²¹ Riis 1977, pp. 197–198. Hoffmann 1975, pp. 139–145.

¹²² Adam appears to follow Sven's account when he tells that Harald was a martyr and that miracles took place at his grave. *Magistri Adami Bremensis* II, 28, pp. 88–89.

¹²³ Breengaard 1982, pp. 229–230.

the Danish kings in the eyes of the outside world. Seen from this perspective the importance of the cult of the Odense saint was more on the wider European stage than it was within the arena of Danish dynastic politics. Certainly the fact that Erik ejegod went out of his way to seek papal approval for the cult, a decidedly rare step to take in this period, lends some weight to this interpretation.¹²⁴ King Erik inherited a cult which had emerged independently of royal involvement. In this respect there is a parallel here with the cults of St Ólafr and St Magnús which were both established by churchmen rather than kinsmen of the saints. It was not Earl Rögnvaldr but Bishop Vilhjálmr, in apparent defiance of Earl Páll, who canonized Magnús Erlendsson. The sanctity of St Ólafr was formally recognised by Bishop Grímkell and King Sven, not King Magnús góði or King Haraldr harðráði. Similarly, King Erik only began sup-

¹²⁴ On the relations between the Danish kings and the papacy around the turn of the twelfth century see Nyberg 2000, pp. 57–58. King Erik himself may have argued the case of Knud's sanctity before Pope Urban II on his pilgrimage to Rome in 1098. The greater awareness or interest of Danish kings and churchmen in securing a papal canonization for Knud IV surely reflects the relatively close relations between Denmark and the papacy from the mid eleventh century onwards. In particular, Gregory VII (1073–1085) was keen to keep good contact with Denmark as shown by his correspondance with both King Sven Estridssen and his son and successor, Harald hen. See Cowdrey 1998, pp. 454–459. *Idem*, 1989. The most important issue on the agenda was, of course, the possibility of establishing an independent Scandinavian archbishopric. But additionally Gregory VII was eager to hold up Sven as an ideal king who protected the Church and showed proper obedience to the See of St Peter. In a letter to Harald hen the pope told that he should follow in the footsteps of his father who had surpassed all the kings and emperors of Christendom. *The Registry of Gregory the Great 1073–1085*, ed. and transl. by H. E. J. Cowdrey (Oxford, 2002), p. 255. In this respect the canonization of Knud IV can therefore be seen as a logical continuation of papal policy towards royal authority on the Christian periphery. For further reading on this policy see Cowdrey 1989. Haki Antonsson 2006, pp. 78–79. Of course it also mattered that King Erik was willing to recognise Paschal II (and earlier Urban II) rather than the anti-pope favoured by the emperor. This indeed can be seen as setting a precedent of such papal rewards for policial support. The sources related to Alexander III's canonization of Edward the Confessor in 1161 show clearly that it was facilitated by King Henry II's support for him rather than the anti-pope Victor IV. Scholz 1961, pp. 50–51. Although not expressed as overtly by the same pope, similar political motives undoubtedly helped to secure in 1169 the papal canonization Knud Lavard Sven Estridssen my well have planned the establishment of a cult of King Harald bluetooth. As earlier mentioned Adam appears to follow Sven's account when he tells that Harald was a martyr and that miracles took place at his grave. *Magistri Adami Bremensis* II, 28, pp. 88–89.

porting the cult in the wake of its establishment by the ecclesiastical community at Odense. In these cases the secular authorities became actively involved only when the political circumstances became more favourable.

For reasons that are not entirely clear the cult of St Knud remained mostly local in nature and there is no evidence that the saint was either seen to be or promoted as the eternal ruler of the Danish kingdom, as St Ólafr was in the Norwegian context. The cult was indeed largely confined to the island of Fyn and no miracle collection has survived although one is likely to have been compiled.¹²⁵ This is perhaps surprising considering that the Odense community was in the forefront of spreading Benedictine monasticism to Zealand in the first half of the twelfth century.¹²⁶

Thus the cult of King Knud was initially established to serve the ecclesiastical community of Odense and only at a later stage promoted by a Danish king for the primary purpose of enhancing his status on the European scene. Undoubtedly the clergy present at the papally approved translation of 1100 were more than willing participants in this effort. The canonization both strengthened Christian kingship in Denmark and confirmed the holiness of a patron of an ecclesiastical community that was operating in a relatively newly-converted society. But in the course of the twelfth century matters became less clear-cut; the authority and ambition of the Church began to grow while the office of kingship became a prize fought over by the descendants of St Knuds' brothers.

Knud Lavard

From 1074 to 1134 Denmark was ruled by the sons of King Sven Estridssen: Harald hen (1074–1080), Knud (1080–1086), Olaf (1086–1095), Erik Ejegod (1095–1103) and Niels (1104–1134). Changes of regency went surprisingly smoothly in this period, especially considering the absence of any fixed rule of succession. The situation, however, became more complicated as the next generation of the ruling dynasty came of age. In this respect the murder in 1131 of

¹²⁵ Mortensen 2006, p. 257.

¹²⁶ Nyberg 1981, p. 103.

Erik ejegod's son, Knud Lavard, committed by Magnus, the son of King Niels, was the event that sparked the dynastic strife which was only terminated in 1157 when Valdemar I became sole ruler. Following the murder of Knud Lavard his brother, Erik emune, had himself declared king and in the battle of Fotevig (1134) defeated and killed Magnus and, shortly afterwards, King Niels himself.

The account of the translation of Knud Lavard in his *Vita altera* stresses the important role played by his son, King Valdemar I (1154/57–1182), in the establishment of Knud's cult. It tells that not long after Knud's remains had been buried at a church in Ringsted, many wonders occurred there which testified to his sanctity.¹²⁷ From the start, we are told, hostile forces worked against the recognition of the duke's saintly status. Thus two priests of the church tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to stop the miraculous occurrences at the site by throwing broth made from an unclean animal on his resting place.¹²⁸ Fifteen years passed and in the reign of King Erik lam (1137–1146) an attempt was made to have Knud's sanctity officially recognised. In 1146 Valdemar, the son of Knud Lavard, and Sven (son of Erik ejegod) planned to exhume Knud's earthly remains and translate them to a reliquary "in order, after their hearts desire, to honour Valdemar's father and Sven's nephew's memory".¹²⁹ Sven's and Valdemar's incentive for recognising Knud Lavard's sanctity at this point in time was probably their planned military raid cum Crusade against the pagan Wends. This would have followed King Conrad III of Germany who, prior to his participation in the Second Crusade in 1146, secured the papal canonization of Emperor Henry II.¹³⁰ It is told, however, that Archbishop Eskil of Lund (1137–1177) strongly opposed this project on the grounds that it contravened the papacy's right to approve of new saints and he forbade any such action to be taken in relation to Knud Lavard. Nevertheless, Valdemar and Sven ignored Eskil's admonition, elevated Knud's bones and placed them in a shrine.

A conspicuous feature of *Vita altera* is the emphasis placed on the ecclesiastical opposition to the cult. The hero of the work is Valdemar

¹²⁷ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 200–204.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹²⁹ "Inde inuito consilio Waldemarum patris et Sveno patruus secundum opinionem suam honori consulentes eius reliquias de tumulo in feretrum transferre disposerunt". *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹³⁰ J. M. Jensen 2004, p. 73. K. V. Jensen 2001, pp. 164–179.

who from the 1140s onwards is presented as a stubborn promoter of Knud Lavard's sanctity in the face of clerical hostility and objections. Thus two priests attempt to suppress the cult by somewhat primitive means while Eskil refuses to officially recognise Knud's sanctity on account of ecclesiastical principle. In passing it is worth observing that the archbishop's stance is interesting in respect of local attitudes to papal interference in the creation of new saints' cults. If the *Vita altera* is taken literally on this matter, Eskil's stance represents a surprisingly early case of local support for a papal monopoly in this field. Although the papacy had been extending its role in the process of canonization since the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073–85), in the 1140s the tradition had not yet developed where it was considered un-canonical to proclaim a new saint without papal approval. This only happened in the reign of popes Alexander III (1159–1181) and his immediate successors.¹³¹

But of course the account is a highly selective account, which was composed on the occasion, or not long after, the translation of Knud Lavard in 1170. From other sources it is known that King Erik emune (1134–1137) took steps to promote the sanctity of his brother. In 1135 the king, in his brother's memory, granted privileges to a Benedictine monastery at Ringsted that was located near the church where Knud was buried.¹³² This act probably represented a renewal of an older monastic community in Ringsted, a community which appears to have been founded in the late eleventh century independently of the royal authority.¹³³ The monks assembled at this foundation were in all likelihood recruited from Odense and Erik no doubt intended to establish a community that would promote the cult of Knud Lavard. Certainly the first hagiographic work on Knud, written by the Englishman Robert of Ely around the same time, was a part of this initiative. Although Robert's work has only fragmentarily survived, it is possible to establish that it consisted of the three hagiographic traditional sections *vita*, *passio* and *miracula* and one fragment shows that it was dedicated to King Erik emune.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Kemp 1945, pp. 13–28. *Idem* 1948, pp. 82–107. Vauchez 1997, pp. 22–32.

¹³² *Diplomatarium Danicum*, I række, bind II (1053–1169), ed. by Lauritz Weibull (København, 1963), no. 65.

¹³³ Nyberg 2000, p. 42.

¹³⁴ The surviving fragments (some of them preserved in other works) are published in *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 234–41. On the textual problems relating to this work see Gertz's preface, *ibid.*, pp. 183–188 and Gad 1961, pp. 162–163.

The assassination of Erik emune in 1137 put a halt to the development of Knud's cult. Judging from *Vita altera* Knud's body had not even been exhumed in 1146. It should be considered that the aim of the work was, of course, to enhance the role of Valdemar in relation to the cult of his father and one way of achieving this aim was to emphasise the primitive state of the cult prior to his intervention.¹³⁵ However, precious little is known about the cult between 1135 and 1157 although it is clear that Sven grate, as king in Scania and Zealand, followed through his interest in it by granting in 1148 land and additional privileges to the Ringsted community.¹³⁶ Sven's stated reason for acting thus was to give thanks to God for aiding his possession of the whole kingdom. Nevertheless, it should be noted that neither Erik's letter of privileges of 1135 nor Sven's letter of 1148 directly refer to Knud's sanctity.

When Valdemar Knudsson assumed sole rulership in 1157 he immediately began to promote the cult of his father. Thus in the same year he supplied resources to gild Knud's reliquary.¹³⁷ But the papal schism that followed Adrian IV's death in 1159 delayed whatever plans Valdemar may have entertained for a formal canonization. The king, as vassal of the emperor, recognised Frederick I's candidate, Victor IV, whereas Archbishop Eskil of Lund opted for Alexander III. As a result in 1161 the archbishop went into exile. During the early 1160s Valdemar sought to shake off his dependence on the emperor and bring Archbishop Eskil back into the fold. In 1166 Valdemar recognised Pope Alexander III and in the following year Eskil returned to Denmark. Then in 1169 a delegation from the Danish king, headed by Archbishop Stephan of Uppsala, sought papal permission for the canonization of Knud Lavard and in November of the same year Pope Alexander III issued a bull confirming

¹³⁵ In light of Sven's betrayal in 1157, it is somewhat surprising that the work tells that he joined forces with Valdemar in order to have Knud enshrined in 1146. To my knowledge his curious inclusion in the *Vita altera* has not been addressed. However, one can perhaps interpret it as a deliberate ploy to enhance the status of Valdemar as Knud Lavard's favourite. Both believed in Knud's sanctity but at the battle of Grathehed in 1157 the saint decided in favour of Valdemar. Thus Valdemar's divine right to rulership was confirmed through a sort of trial by battle. That Valdemar himself saw the battle in this light is indicated by a letter of privileges, issued shortly after his victory in 1157, where he claims God had been on his side in the inter-dynastic conflict. *Diplomatarium Danicum*, no. 120.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 101.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 126.

Knud's sanctity. Finally Knud Lavard's relics were translated at a solemn meeting of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries in Ringsted on 25 June 1170. On the same occasion Archbishop Eskil crowned Valdemar's young son.¹³⁸

Thus what we are confronted with is a cult that from the beginning served an obvious propaganda purpose in the complicated dynastic and factional politics within the Danish kingdom from the 1130s onwards. Unlike what we have encountered in relation to the cults of St Magnús of Orkney, St Ólafr of Norway and St Knud of Odense there is no evidence to suggest that Knud Lavard's sanctity enjoyed ecclesiastical support until Archbishop Eskil's involvement in late 1160s. Although the Benedictine monastery in Ringsted was the centre of Knud's cult in the reign of Erik emune, this only came about as a result of royal initiative. Indeed there is little evidence that the Ringsted community did much to promote Knud's sanctity following Erik's death. It is this peculiar feature of the cult that explains why nearly four decades lapsed between Knud's death on the one hand and a formal recognition of his saintly status on the other hand. The establishment of the archbishopric of Lund in 1103/1104 was of crucial importance in this respect for now the Danish kings had to confront an ecclesiastical authority that was able to act, in certain cases at least, according to its own interests.¹³⁹ Until the late 1160s, or when Eskil returned from exile, there was little incentive for the highest clergy in Denmark to support the Knud's cult.

We can only speculate what motives lay behind Eskil's objection to the *translatio* of 1146. According to one school of thought the archbishop was unwilling to sanctify a member of the Erik emune-line and thus openly involve himself in dynastic politics.¹⁴⁰ Ringsted had become closely associated Erik's branch of the royal family while Odense, on the other hand, had been favoured by King Niels.¹⁴¹ Carsten Breengaard on the other hand is inclined to take Eskil's

¹³⁸ On these political developments see Hansen 1966, pp. 56–75.

¹³⁹ In the twelfth century, as Lars Hermanson has vividly demonstrated, Danish "churchmen did not constitute a united and optically independent group". Hermanson 2001, p. 260. Thus it is suspect to speak of a Danish Church that unswervingly promoted a uniform agenda of ecclesiastical independence. There is, however, no doubt that ecclesiastics such as Eskil used to their advantage whatever additional means and resources their membership of the international Church provided. Their pivotal role in the establishment of the cult of saints is a case in point.

¹⁴⁰ Koch 1950, p. 145.

¹⁴¹ Nyberg 2000, pp. 99–104.

excuse at face value, i.e. that this champion of ecclesiastical independence was genuinely concerned about papal prerogative in relation to new saints' cults.¹⁴² The two options are of course not mutually exclusive but in the context of this study the reasons for Eskil's objections are of secondary importance. What is of primary significance is that the archbishop did not back the cult of Knud Lavard until it was in his interest to do so.

But in the end the cult of Knud Lavard did become a point of contact between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. That it was Pope Alexander III who approved of the translation of the saint represented in a sense a vindication of Archbishop Eskil's stance during his quarrel with King Valdemar. In addition, it was certainly in the interest of the Church to regulate the succession to the throne and thus avoid a repeat of the political turmoil that had plagued Danish society between 1134 and 1157. The sanctification of Knud Lavard at Ringsted in 1170 further legitimised the coronation of Valdemar's oldest son, which took place on the same occasion. Moreover, during his lifetime Knud Lavard had been associated with military campaigns against the pagan Slavs and he thus he represented an ideal patron saint for Valdemar's Baltic Crusades cum conquests. Thus in 1177 Valdemar founded St Knud's guild which from the beginning was steeped in crusading ideology.¹⁴³

If the translation of Knud Lavard in 1170 cemented the relationship between king and Church, albeit only temporarily, it also at the same time highlighted the relative strength of the two authorities. About seven years earlier, at the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson, Archbishop Eysteinn of Nidaros had used his role as a guardian of St Ólaf's relics to enhance the standing of the Norwegian Church in relation to the royal authority. In contrast, Archbishop Eskil's part at the Ringsted meeting was limited to bestowing divine legitimation on the new king and carrying out the appropriate procedure of canonization. The different roles played by the two archbishops is but a reflection of the fact that in 1170 Valdemar was in a much stronger position of power than Magnús Erlingsson found himself in 1163/64, as indeed the subsequent fates of the two kings would bear out. Furthermore, in the course of the twelfth century the Norwegian Church had appropriated, or rather re-appropriated, the cult of King

¹⁴² Breengaard 1982, pp. 243–244.

¹⁴³ Hørby 1988, pp. 203–204. Jensen 2002, pp. 63–88.

Ólafr and when it came to the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson, the archbishop of Nidaros was able to present himself as the guardian of his shrine. In contrast, the cult of Knud Lavard had from the beginning been a dynastic project.

3.4. *St Erik of Sweden*

In comparison with the official cults of the other Scandinavian princely martyrs the sources relating to King Erik Jedvardson are in decidedly scant supply. The little evidence we have show that King Erik came to the throne around the year 1150.¹⁴⁴ Erik's claim to kingship appears to have rested on his marriage to the grand-daughter of Ingi (d. c. 1110), the last king of the Steinkell dynasty in the male-line. In 1160 he was killed in battle against Magnus Henriksson, a Danish pretender to the throne, who was related to the competing Sverker dynasty through his maternal-line. Magnus appears to have formed an alliance with Karl, the son of King Sverker whose murder (c. 1150) had facilitated Erik's ascent to the throne. Following Erik's death the alliance between the two broke up and Karl Sverkerson defeated Magnus in 1161. However, in April 1167 the son of Erik, Knut, appeared on the scene and deposed Magnus. Until c. 1194 Knut Eriksson reigned as a king over both Östergötland and Västergötland, two of the most important provinces of medieval Sweden.

If the sources for the reign of St Erik are in short supply, the same holds true regarding the evidence for the emergence of his cult. The earliest source on the matter is found in a calendar from the church of Vallentuna in the Uppland region, dating from c. 1198, where the king's death-day (May 18th) is recognised.¹⁴⁵ Then the Icelandic *Sverris saga*, from c. 1220 (or at least this part of the saga), informs that St Erik's relics were by that time enshrined in Uppsala Cathedral.¹⁴⁶ Strictly speaking, these are the only "concrete" sources for the cult of King Erik around the turn of the twelfth century. However additional, albeit more circumstantial, evidence regarding

¹⁴⁴ Although it is customary to refer to Erik as the king of Sweden his authority (and that of his dynasty) was very much focused on Västergötland. See Sawyer 1989, pp. 27–28.

¹⁴⁵ *Liber ecclesiae Vallentunensis*, ed. by Toni Schmid (Stockholm, 1945), p. 45. For a recent introduction to this calendar see Björkvall 1998.

¹⁴⁶ "*Eiricr hvilir i scrini i Svíþjóðu at Uppsölum*". *Sverris Saga*, p. 107.

the earliest stage of the cult has been put forward. A single coin, dating from the reign of Knut Eriksson, has been interpreted as evidence that the king had promoted the cult of his father. The coin shows a beardless king, holding a church in one hand and a lily-sceptre in the other, and the inscription on the coin reads IVA.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore it has been suggested that the inscription refers to the three main attributes of King Erik's reign as presented in his *Vita*: the saint's patronage of the Church, his just rulership (IVA being an anagram of VIA, referring to *Via Regia* an expression which appears in the *Vita*), and his so-called crusade to Finland—the lily-sceptre allegedly being a Christian symbol that may have been, among other things, associated with crusading. According to this hypothesis the coin indicates that Knut Eriksson was upholding the sanctity of his father in the last quarter of the twelfth century and, moreover, it gives added support to the long-held belief that a prototype of the existing *Vita* had been written in the second half of the twelfth century (see above pp. 26–27). A mural in a church at Eriksberg, Västergötland, dated to the 1170s, seems also to support an early recognition and promotion of King Erik's sanctity. If the identification is correct, he is presented there with a halo extending a sceptre towards a winged cherub hovering over a triumphal arch.¹⁴⁸ Further interpretation of the iconology of the Eriksberg mural has associated it with a section of the *Vita* which deals with Erik's journey along *via regia*, the road travelled (symbolically) by just kings.¹⁴⁹ The combination of the appearance of the concept in the *Vita* and arguably Knut's coin, suggests that as early as the 1170s St Erik was promoted as a saintly king and a model for a just ruler. At a later date his propaganda potential as a crusader against pagans in Finland, an image already present in the *Vita*, was exploited to the full.¹⁵⁰ There is a parallel in this respect with the cult of Knud Lavard.

The paucity of the evidence makes it difficult to assess the importance of the cult in this period and indeed opinions on this matter have differed sharply. Thus J. E. Cross assumes that St Erik was little more than “a minor local saint in the region from where the Vallentuna-

¹⁴⁷ Sjöberg 1983, pp. 252–260. Further explored in *ibid.* 1989, pp. 369–379.

¹⁴⁸ Hernfjäll 1993, pp. 29–42.

¹⁴⁹ Hernfjäll 2000, pp. 23–39.

¹⁵⁰ Lindkvist 1996, pp. 13–33. *Idem* 1999, pp. 124–127.

calendar originated",¹⁵¹ whereas E. Carlsson argues that by the end of the twelfth century Erik had become one of the most important saints in Sweden.¹⁵² Still, on its own the reference in *Sverris saga* shows that King Erik's corporal remains had been elevated and enshrined in Uppsala Cathedral, in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries. But in general it is safe to say that the profile of St Erik's cult was decidedly low until around the mid thirteenth century. One possible reason for this was the apparent demise of the Benedictine, or possibly Cistercian,¹⁵³ chapter at Uppsala.¹⁵⁴ A papal letter of 1224 implies that a cathedral chapter did not serve the archbishop.¹⁵⁵ The cult's fortunes, however, began to rise around the mid thirteenth century. In 1245 the cathedral in Uppsala suffered badly from fire and not long afterwards the archbishop expressed his wish to move the see to Aros, a location which not only offered the benefits of a growing urban community but was also, according to the *Vita*, the place of St Erik's martyrdom. By the 1250s a new cathedral chapter was in place that promoted St Erik's cult in order to facilitate the planned translation of the see. Thus in 1256 a papal letter granted indulgence to pilgrims that visited Uppsala on St Erik's feast-day.¹⁵⁶ In 1273 the relics of St Erik were translated to Östra Aros and not long afterwards installed in the new cathedral, which was jointly dedicated to him and St Lawrence.¹⁵⁷

Returning to the earliest stage of the cult, it is safe to place its emergence within the context of the establishment in 1164 of an archbishopric in Uppsala. In 1152 a papal legate, Nicholas Breakspear, (later to become Pope Adrian IV), oversaw the establishment of the Norwegian archbishopric in Nidaros. In 1153 he travelled to Sweden in order to complete the division of the archbishopric of Lund into three parts. For reasons that have not been entirely explained nothing

¹⁵¹ Cross 1957–61, p. 307. Cross considers it likely that the calendar originated in the Mälaren district.

¹⁵² Carlsson 1944, p. 109.

¹⁵³ The argument for a Cistercian chapter is put forwards in Helander 2000, pp. 64–68.

¹⁵⁴ For the history of the Uppsala bishopric and archbishopric until the late thirteenth century see Helander 2001, pp. 50–112.

¹⁵⁵ Lundegårdh 1997, p. 119.

¹⁵⁶ Helander 2001, pp. 87–89.

¹⁵⁷ Nilsén 2003, p. 534.

came of his endeavours.¹⁵⁸ In 1164, however, the five dioceses of Sweden were finally placed under the authority of the newly established Swedish archbishopric with a base in Uppsala. Although Uppsala had been a bishopric through the twelfth century and a centre of missionary work before that time,¹⁵⁹ it was by no means an automatic choice for the new archbishopric like, for instance, Nidaros had been in Norway on account of St Ólafr's cult. The oldest Swedish bishopric was that of Skara in Västergötland, which King Ólafr skötkonungr had founded in the early eleventh century, and by the early twelfth century there were probably cathedrals in both Linköping in Östergötland and Sigtuna in Uppland.¹⁶⁰ Moreover (Old) Uppsala had, of course, been a well-known centre of paganism. But having decided on Uppsala it must have been of some importance for Stephan, its first archbishop—and probably an Englishman and former monk of the Cistercian house of Alvastra—to enhance its status by promoting the cult of a native saint. As earlier emphasised, in this period the acquisition or creation of indigenous saints' cults appears to have been a priority for bishoprics and archbishoprics. Following the example of St Ólafr's cult in Nidaros the promotion of a native saint was a logical step to take for Archbishop Stephan and ecclesiastics at Uppsala.¹⁶¹ As such, the cult represented a unifying symbol in a situation where the Christian religion had made unequal impact in the various regions of the country.¹⁶² In turn, Stephan's involvement in the establishment of St Erik's cult could explain why he was chosen to spearhead the delegation that presented the case for Knud Lavard's papal canonization.¹⁶³

It is generally assumed, as alluded to earlier, that a colony of Benedictine (or Cistercian) monks from England was in place in Uppsala in the last quarter of the twelfth century. The monks would

¹⁵⁸ Bergquist 2002, pp. 45–48.

¹⁵⁹ Westman 1915, pp. 15–17.

¹⁶⁰ Sawyer 2003, p. 155.

¹⁶¹ Lundegårdh 1997, pp. 116–117.

¹⁶² This aspect of the cult has been mentioned in relation to the more Christian Götaland and the apparently less Christian Svealand. Tunberg 1941, pp. 277–278. However, this observation must be modified in light of clear Christian presence in some parts of the Uppland region. See Broberg 1991, pp. 49–79.

¹⁶³ Anderson 1964, pp. 402–410. My interpretation is different from Westman's who argues that Stephan opposed Erik's canonization. Westman 1915, pp. 172–173, 222–223. Westman of course put forward his case prior to the appearance of Tore Nyberg's important contribution on the dating of Erik's translation.

have served, presumably in a cathedral priory, the shrine of St Erik in a similar way as they did in Odense for St Knud IV and in Ringsted for St Knud Lavard.¹⁶⁴ Indeed the English influence detectable in the Vallentuna-calendar suggests that Benedictine monks were responsible for its compilation.¹⁶⁵ The relatively sophisticated appearance of symbolic iconography in the old church at Eriksberg and on Knut's coin of the 1180s further supports the hypothesis that we are, first and foremost, dealing here with an ecclesiastically-inspired cult which was closely associated with the recently founded archbishopric of Uppsala.

In addition to the role of the archbishopric in the emergence of the cult the involvement of Erik's son, King Knut, is also likely. The date of Erik's translation is here the primary indicator. According to the *Vita*, Erik was killed on the 18th of May 1160, the feast of Christ's ascension.¹⁶⁶ But considering that this particular feast fell on the 5th of May in that year and that the calendar of Vallentuna refers to May 18th as Erik's feastday, it is logical to conclude that the *Vita* is here referring to the day of his translation rather than the day of his death. This leaves three possible dates between 1160 and 1198 for the translation to have taken place: 1167, 1178 and 1189. Tore Nyberg has argued that the earliest one, i.e. May of 1167, is the likeliest date, for earlier that year Knut Erikson had defeated Karl Sverkersson in a battle on Vikingsö. That Knut had the remains of his father translated to Uppsala to celebrate this victory seems quite plausible.¹⁶⁷

Admittedly the evidence is slender. Still there is probably sufficient grounds to conclude that in tandem the Archbishop of Uppsala and King Knut Eriksson promoted the cult of King Erik Jedvardson. Indeed it is difficult to envisage any other authorities in Sweden taking the initiative in this matter at this particular point in time. For Knut the sanctification of his father was naturally a potent way to consolidate his claim to the throne. But for Stephan and his successors the cult was arguably of greater importance. The image of St Erik as a ruler who supported the Church and conducted himself as a

¹⁶⁴ Gallén 1976, pp. 1–21. Further on the possible relevance the monastery may have had for the cult, see Nyberg 1992, p. 66.

¹⁶⁵ Gallén 1976, pp. 10–14.

¹⁶⁶ *Scriptores rerum Svecicarum* I, p. 265.

¹⁶⁷ Nyberg 1975, pp. 12–18.

rex iustus was an ideal model to hold up to future kings. The case of St Erik Jedvardson thus represents another example how the interests of the temporal and the spiritual authorities aligned in the promotion of a princely martyr cult.

3.5. *Conclusions*

In his study of the royal cults of Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England, Erik Hoffmann has emphasised the political function of the princely martyrs in the Nordic lands. In his evaluation the cults served the needs and aims of the secular authority. Most notably the sanctification of a murdered or killed ruler by a member of his own dynasty was a potent way of legitimising rulership in a society in which the notion of Christian kingship was only beginning to take roots. Hoffmann's conclusion is a valid one although only up to a point. It has been argued here that the stake which the spiritual authorities had in both creating and maintaining saints' cults of this nature should not been underestimated. In a sense their history is best examined in the context of interaction between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*.

In the case of Orkney we have seen how the cult was first promoted by Bishop Vilhjálmr and only at a later date taken up by Earl Rögnvaldr. A similar progression can be observed in relation to the cults of St Ólafr, St Knud of Odense and to an extent that of St Erik of Sweden. However, the pattern is only of a general nature for the motives the churchmen had for promoting the cults varied from case to case. In Orkney the bishop used the cult to distance his office from its traditional association with one particular branch of the ruling dynasty. Although in Norway Bishop Grímkell was undoubtedly responding to popular pressure when he canonized King Ólafr, he may also have seen the cult as an important focal point for religious observance in a recently converted country. It was only when a bishop took up permanent residence in Nidaros that the Church began to appropriate the cult for its own purpose. The ecclesiastics of Odense translated the corporal remains of Knud IV in order to secure a heavenly royal patron for their community and to uphold the ideals of Christian kingship. A cult centred on the king and his loyal retainers served as a potent expression of the sacred nature of kingship and the illegality of regicide. In Sweden the most plausible scenario is that Stephan promoted the sanctity of

St Erik so as to enhance the standing of the newly established archbishopric of Uppsala. The cult of Knud Lavard is the exception because from the beginning it was a purely political undertaking which the Church had little incentive to support. Only with changing political and ecclesiastical circumstances did Archbishop Eskil deem it appropriate to join forces with King Valdemar and have the murdered duke canonized.

Although the ecclesiastics in Orkney, Norway, Denmark and Sweden upheld the princely martyr cults for varying reasons, there is nevertheless a common thread that runs through the cases discussed here. In eleventh- and twelfth-century Scandinavia the Church was in a formative stage where it relied heavily on the patronage of the secular authority while simultaneously striving to establish a separate identity. In the same period the secular authority was also being transformed in line with the more institutionalised kingships of Christian Europe where the ruler held his office by the grace of God. Thus the cults of the princely martyrs served the interests of both authorities during a formative period in their development.

PART FOUR

SECULAR LEADERS ASSOCIATED WITH SANCTITY IN THE TWELFTH-CENTURY SCANDINAVIAN LANDS

4.1. *Introduction*

An important development in the history of the cults examined so far took place when both ecclesiastics and temporal rulers joined forces in their promotion. Bishop Grímkell sought approval for St Ólafr's cult from King Sven Álfífuson, whereas Bishop Hubald of Odense and Archbishop Eskil of Lund co-operated with King Erik Ejegod and King Valdemar I respectively in furthering the two major princely cults of twelfth-century Denmark. In Orkney, Bishop Vilhjálmr canonized Magnús Erlendsson and shortly thereafter Earl Rögnvaldr commenced the building of a cathedral in honour of the saint. In Sweden the likeliest scenario is that Archbishop Stephan worked with King Knut Eriksson in launching the cult of St Erik. Indeed the act of canonization or *translatio* is frequently presented in the sources as a symbolic expression of the alliance between the temporal and the ecclesiastical authorities. This is evident in Aelnoth of Canterbury's description of Knud IV's translation in 1100,¹ and a similar picture is presented of Knud Lavard's *translatio* at Ringsted.²

Despite the unusual circumstances surrounding Ólafr Haraldsson's local canonization the participation of the reigning king in the proceedings is not neglected:

Þá gekk til at sjá líkama Óláfs konungs Sveinn konungr ok allir hofðingar þeir, er þar váru.[] . . . síðan lagði hann [i.e. Bishop Grímkell] í eldinn hár Óláfs konungs, ok þá er brunnit var reykelsit allt, þá tók byskup upp hárit ór eldinum, ok var þá hárit óbrunnit. Lét byskup

¹ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 133–134.

² “*Hoc anno translatum est corpus sancti Kanuti Ringstadis, filij Erii Egothe. Die illo Danis omnibus gaudium duplicatur, ex parte una, quod pater regis autorizatur, ex parte alia, quod regis filius Kanutus in regem inungitur. Interfuerunt diei illius sollempnitati rex ille Waldemarus, archipresul Æskillus de Lundis, archipresul de Suecia Stephanus . . .* [followed by a list of ecclesiastical dignitaries]”. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

þat sjá konung ok aðra höfðingja. [] Var þat þá byskups atkvæði ok konungs samþykki ok dómr alls herjar, at Óláfr konungr væri sannheilagr.³

Thereupon King Swend, and all the chiefs who were at the place, went out to see King Olaf's body. [] . . . and then [he, i.e. Bishop Grímkell] laid King Olaf's hair on the fire. When all the incense was burnt the bishop took the hair out of the fire, and showed the king and the other chiefs that it was not consumed. . . . After the bishop's recognition with the king's approbation and the decision of the Thing, it was determined that King Olaf should be considered a man truly holy. . . .⁴

Orkneyinga saga mentions that although Vilhjálmr faced Earl Páll's opposition to Earl Magnús' canonization, he nevertheless involved leading men of the earldom in this procedure.⁵ The sources relating to the Scandinavian saints are not unique in stressing the harmony between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in relation to the official recognition of a prince's saintly status. In an early hagiographic text on the martyrs Boris and Gleb the very act of carrying Boris' coffin is made to reflect the close relationship between the princes of Kievan Rus' and the Church:

And having first raised Saint Boris in his wooden coffin, the princes raised the coffin to their shoulders, and preceeded by venerable monks with candles, and after them deacons, and then presbyters, and after them the metropolitans and bishops, they followed after them with the coffin.⁶

The patronage of the secular authority helped to secure the future success of the princely cults. Prior to achieving this status, however, the cults went through a preliminary phase during which the sanctity of the prince was upheld by ecclesiastics and/or the general population (though, as seen, the cult of Knud Lavard represents an interesting exception to this pattern). It is noteworthy that in the majority of cases hitherto examined the cults emerged in less than ideal political circumstances. In fact they appear to have served as focal points for opposition against those in power at the time. Thus

³ *Heimskringla* II, pp. 404–405.

⁴ *Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla. Part Two. The Olaf Sagas*, tr. by Samuel Laing. Revised with introd. and notes by Jacqueline Simpson (Dutton, 1964), pp. 388–389.

⁵ *OS*, p. 124.

⁶ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, pp. 122–23.

it is safe to assume that St Ólafr's saintly reputation was an important factor in rallying people against Danish rule and consolidating support for his young son Magnús. St Magnús' cult may have served a comparable purpose in Rögnvaldr's confrontation with Earl Páll, and the cult of Knud of Odense emerged in the reign of the unpopular Olaf who allegedly was less than enthusiastic about his brother's saintly reputation.

Thus at the earliest stage the future of the cults was far from secure; their success rested on the willingness of churchmen and princes to support them. In the cases analysed so far we have seen how the interests of the two converged in the promotion of the cults. In this section, however, I will examine instances where potential cults did not reach this crucial "official" stage and consequently left behind only the faintest of traces in the sources.

4.2. *King Ólafr Tryggvason of Norway and King Erik emune of Denmark*

An appropriate starting point is King Ólafr Tryggvason, the first missionary king of Norway, who in medieval times was credited with bringing Christianity to Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the earldom of Orkney. In the year 1000 Ólafr was killed in the sea-battle of Svolder as he fought against the forces of King Sven tjúguskegg of Denmark and his allies. As in the case of King Harold Godwineson following the Battle of Hastings, a tradition developed that Ólafr had escaped from the scene of battle and assumed the robe of a hermit.⁷

Although Ari Þorgilsson in his *Íslendingabók*, written 1122 × 1133, emphasises Ólafr's involvement in the conversion of Iceland, he makes no mention of the king's saintly reputation. Still, in light of the fact that Ari does not even touch on Ólafr Haraldsson's sanctity which, of course, was well established by the time he composed *Íslendingabók*, his silence on this matter in relation to Ólafr Tryggvason is scarcely conclusive. In the Icelandic context it is first with Oddr Snorrason's *Saga of Ólafr Tryggvason* (composed probably c. 1180) that the missionary king is associated with sanctity.⁸ Oddr, a monk in the Benedictine

⁷ Cohen 1995, pp. 143–153.

⁸ On this dating and the place of Oddr's work in the Kings' saga corpus see Andersson 2004.

house at Þingeyrar, wrote the saga in Latin but it has only been preserved in an Old Norse translation from the first half of the thirteenth century which has survived in two near complete versions and a fragment of a third one.⁹

One reason behind Oddr's composition of the saga was his wish to present Ólafr Tryggvason as a saintly figure. His work is structured in a similar way as the stories of the apostles (*postulasögur*) which had been translated into the Old Norse vernacular in the course of the twelfth century. Ólafr's life is presented as an unceasing journey or pilgrimage that has as its primary object the bringing of Christianity to the pagan people of the North. Just as St Stephen of Hungary was referred to as the "apostle of Hungary", thus Oddr designates Ólafr as the "apostle of the North".¹⁰ In his prologue Oddr tells that although the king did not perform miracles after his death, we should not doubt his sanctity:

Allom er þat kvnict. at eptir lifit skein iartegnom. en helge O. konungr. en inn fregsti O. konungr Try. s. var monnum ecke kvnr i iartegna gerð eptir lifit. þo trvum ver hann dyrligan mann ok agetan oc guðz vin. þotti hann ollum olíkr i atgervi meðan hann lifðe. þott eptir lifit veri þat eigi berat hværr krapta maðr hann var. oc ecke skolom vær forvitnaz gvðz leynda lvti.¹¹

It is known to all that after his life the sainted King Olaf shone brightly with miracles, but the renowned King Olaf Tryggvason was not known to men for the making of miracles after his death. Still we believe him to be a glorious man and outstandingly devoted to God. He was deemed to be unlike all men in accomplishments as long as he lived, although after his death it was not revealed that he was a man of such powers. But we should not inquire into God's secrets.¹²

Jan de Vries even assumed that Oddr composed his saga of Ólafr Tryggvason in order to obtain papal approval for a canonization of the king. Although this appears unlikely, it seems that the Icelanders and their Church were in need of a saint which they could identify with and that would serve as a counterweight to St Ólafr Haraldsson,

⁹ Sverrir Tómasson 1988, pp. 347–351. See also Bagge 1992, pp. 21–38, especially pp. 22–31.

¹⁰ Sverrir Tómasson 1988, pp. 261–279. Lönnroth 2000.

¹¹ *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, p. 1.

¹² *The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason. Oddr Snorrason*, tr. from the Icelandic with introd. and notes by T. M. Anderson. *Islandica lü* (Cornell, 2003), p. 35.

whose cult, it hardly needs pointing out, was closely linked with the Norwegian royal authority. The obvious choice was the king who had played a pivotal role in the conversion of the country.¹³ The establishment of the cults of Bishops Þorlákr Þórhallsson of Skálholt and Jón Ögmundarson of Hólar at the turn of the twelfth century, suggests that ecclesiastics were scanning the horizon for saints that would be able to strengthen the identity of the Icelandic Church while, at the same time, serve the religious needs of the community.¹⁴

No doubt Oddr was acutely aware of the problems inherent in promoting the sanctity of Ólafr Tryggvason. Most notably, the absence of posthumous miracles made him a somewhat weak magnet for an emergent cult.¹⁵ A case in point is the contrast here with the cult of Bishop Þorlákr, whose miraculous powers proved particularly potent. In any event, Oddr's end product was not the usual hagiographic dossier consisting of a Life and a miracle section but rather a kind of semi-hagiographic work intended to enhance the reputation of the first missionary king of Norway whose memory had been overshadowed by the cult of Ólafr Haraldsson. This aim could only be achieved by stressing the saintly qualities of St Ólafr's missionary forerunner.

There is no cultic evidence for the veneration of Ólafr as a saint in Iceland.¹⁶ This presumably accounts for the hesitant, almost apologetic, tone that Oddr adopts when he addresses the king's saintly status.¹⁷ Oddr's ambiguous attitude on this matter may explain why

¹³ de Vries 1942/1967, p. 242. On the presentation of Ólafr Tryggvason in the earliest sources see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1999.

¹⁴ For an overview of the emergence of Þorlákr's cult and the associated hagiography, see Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2000, pp. 120–131.

¹⁵ Pointed out by Holtsmark 1956, p. 15.

¹⁶ Cormack 1994 A, p. 10.

¹⁷ For example in the following passage: "*En þessi Ólafr T. s. sidan er hann let ríkt í þeim hinum miðla bardaga er hann barðiz a Orminum langa. þa er hann brot numinn fra oss. sua at eigi ma þat glögt vita iardligrir menn. huers heilagleiks hann er. Oc eigi er þat synt með hueriom tacnum oc iartegnum hann er. en engi iwar at at hann er af guði sendr Gerði guð hann oc forkunnlegra aðrum konungum oc dasamlegan i allum farsæligum lutum Oc þui er at allum oss nauðsynlect at lova nafn drottins Iesu Cristz firir þenna mann. er hann gaf sua mikinn matt oc algerfi a þa leið sem ver lofum guð af hinum helga Olafi konungi*". *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, p. 157. "But the present Olaf Tryggvason, after he lost the realm in the great battle that he fought on Ormr inn langi, was taken away from us so that mortal men cannot know clearly what the nature of his saintliness is. Nor has it been revealed what signs and miracles are connected with him, but no one doubts that he was sent by God. God also made him more outstanding than other kings and admirable in all providential ways. For that reason we must all praise the name of the Lord

another monk of Þingeyrar, Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/19), composed in Latin a new, and what is believed to have been a more elaborate and distinctly hagiographic, account of Ólafr's life. Unfortunately Gunnlaugr's work is lost, apart from translated sections that were incorporated into the so-called *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, an early fourteenth century compilation of existing material about the king. Thus, in the Icelandic context what we appear to be confronted with is an effort by the monks of Þingeyrar to cast an aura of saintliness over the ruler that had been responsible, if only indirectly, for the conversion of their country. Although there was apparently no cultic veneration of Ólafr, both Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson believed in and upheld his sanctity. One must assume that at the turn of the twelfth century the two were not the only Icelandic ecclesiastics to hold this view.

Around the same time as Oddr and Gunnlaugr were writing their biographies of Ólafr Tryggvason the Norwegian author of *Historia Norvegiae*—a work which, at least in its preserved form, traces the history of the country up until the arrival of Ólafr Haraldsson on the scene in 1015—conveyed not unsimilar sentiments regarding the saintly status of the missionary king.¹⁸ Thus he refers to Ólafr as *beatus*:

Postquam vero *beatus Olauus* per salutarem dextre excelsi mutacionem gratiam baptismi cum maxima parte exercitus sui assecutus est, ad Norwegiam transfretauit, habens secum Iohannem episcopum et Tangbrandum presbyterum, quem ad Glaciales misit predicare.¹⁹

Once the *blessed Olav* along with the majority of his soldiers had achieved the grace of baptism owing to the healthful change wrought in him

Jesus Christ for this man, to whom we granted such great power and distinction, in the same way we praise God for King Olaf the Saint." *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, p. 102. Dietrich Hofmann has argued that another work allegedly composed by Oddr, *Yngvars saga víðforla*, is intended partly as an apology for a saint without any posthumous miracles. Hoffmann 1981, pp. 215–222. As has been pointed there are examples of saints' Lives without posthumous miracles, for instance Rimbert's *vita* of Ansgar. Cormack 1994 B, p. 27.

¹⁸ The exact dating of *Historia Norvegiae* is uncertain. See Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1937, pp. 20–29. The work is only preserved in a transcription, discovered by P. A. Munch in 1849, of a now lost fifteenth-century manuscript. The present scholarly consensus is that the work could have been written as early as the 1170s and as late as 1220. Anderson 1985, p. 201.

¹⁹ *Historia Norvegie*, ed. by I. Ekrem and L. B. Mortensen, tr. by P. Fischer (Copenhagen, 2003), p. 94. I have added the italics in the following excerpts.

by the right hand of the Most High, he crossed the seas to Norway, taking with him Bishop Johannes and the priest, Tangbrand, whom he sent to the Icelanders.²⁰

Post hec filiis Haconis comitis regnum totius Norwegie a <Sweinone>, scilicet Tiuguskeg, conceditur. Qui XIII annis eidem regno comites presidebant. Et sanctam dei ecclesiam, quam *beatus Olauus* egregie plantauerat, Iohannes rigauerat, isti fere eradicauerunt.²¹

Afterwards the rule of all Norway was consigned by Svend Tveskæg to the sons of Håkon jarl. For fourteen years they governed this same realm as jarls, and God's holy Church, which the *blessed Olav* had planted so painstakingly and Johannes had watered, was almost uprooted by these two.²²

In two other passages the language assumes a somewhat hagiographic tinge:

Verum enimvero curam gerens Conditor creature sue, hunc tyrannum tam remotum tamque indomitum per uiscera misericordie sue mirabiliter uisitauit, uisitando illuminauit, *ut quos eo tenus umbra mortis operuerat, stola claritatis eterne indueret.*²³

But the Creator, bestowing concern on His creature, through the bowels of His compassion miraculously came to this viking, so alienated from Him and so untamed, and in his visitation enlightenend him in such a way *that those whom He had hitherto shrouded beneath the shadow of death He might now garb with the robe of eternal brightness.*²⁴

Sed dum juxta Selandiam iter ageret, *ut ouis a lupis*, ita iste ab inimicis insidiatus preuenitur.²⁵

Nevertheless, while he was pursuing his voyage close to Sjælland, his enemies forestalled him and he was waylaid *as a sheep is by wolves.*²⁶

Judging from the Old Norse corpus *beatus* (*sell*) and *sanctus* (*heilagr*) were interchangeable in this period, as indeed was the case in medieval Europe in general, although on occasions the latter term may have carried a more formal connotation.²⁷

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98–100.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁷ See the various uses of similar terms in Old Norse literature collected by Johan Fritzner 1886, p. 639. In the Lives of St Þorlákr Þórhallsson the terms *sell* or *heilagr*

The Norwegian Theodoricus monachus, in his *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* (c. 1180), emphasises the pivotal role played by Ólafr Tryggvason in the conversion of Norway and his involvement in bringing Christianity to Greenland, Orkney and Iceland. As Arne Odd Johnsen has pointed out, Theodoricus places the king nearly on a par with his saintly namesake in Norwegian history.²⁸ The former laid the foundation on which the latter built. Both kings are presented as champions of Christianity and ideal rulers in their relations with the Church. It is no co-incidence that Theodoricus—like the author of the *Historia Norvegiae*—stresses the religious impact Ólafr's reign had on these peripheral regions because this tradition could only enhance the claim of the Norwegian archbishopric to be the mother-Church of the Atlantic colonies. In other words, it was in the interest of the Norwegian ecclesiastics to uphold the memory of Ólafr Tryggvason.²⁹

are interchangeably applied while Bishop Guðmundr Arason is usually referred to as *sell*. On the equivalent Latin terms see Kemp 1948, pp. 97–98, 116. Vauchez 1997, 85–103. A weaker form of saintly attribute used in medieval Iceland is “Guðs vinr”, “God’s friend”. This phrase does appear in Oddr’s work but usually with other more suggestive adjectives: “þo trum ver hann ver hann dyrlegan mann og agetan oc guðz vin . . .” [“... nevertheless we believe him to be a glorious man and God’s friend”]. *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, p. 1 (my own translation). The appearance of the term *beatus* in *Historia Norvegiae* has been used, not very convincingly in my estimation, to support the hypothesis that the work was composed in the early 1160s because the author would not have dared to call Ólafr Tryggvason *beatus* after St Ólafr became “officially” *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* in 1163/64. Hanssen 1949, pp. 27–28.

²⁸ *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae*, pp. 13–21. See also Johnsen 1939, pp. 69–70.

²⁹ Inger Ekrem has in fact maintained that *Historia Norvegiae* was composed prior to the establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros and in support of that undertaking. The emphasis placed in the work on the achievements of Ólafr Tryggvason (and the reference to him as *beatus*) suggests that the author wished to further his case for canonization. Ekrem 1998, pp. 58–59. Lars Lönnroth argued that in the second half of the twelfth century a patriotic faction emerged in the Trøndelag region of Norway which upheld the memory of Ólafr Tryggvason. This faction, which came to be known as the *Birkibeinar* and assumed power under the leadership of Sverrir Sigurðarson, was against the growing influence of the international Church. Thus, according to Lönnroth, the missionary king became both a rallying point for this cause as well as a counterweight to the cult of St Ólafr. Moreover, Lönnroth places the interest of the Icelandic monks at Þingeyrar within the same context of strife between the “national church” (Ólafr Tryggvason) and the “universal Church” (St Ólafr). Lönnroth 1964, pp. 54–94, especially pp. 79–94. Lönnroth’s intriguing hypothesis has, as far as I can see, little or no basis in the sources. In spite of this some commentators have accepted the notion that there was a cult of some sorts of Ólafr Tryggvason Trøndelag. For instance Sawyer 1987, p. 302.

Although Ólafr Tryggvason hardly fits the profile of a princely martyr, his case deserves to be mentioned in this study for it shows how sanctity could be associated with a secular figure in the absence of an organised cult or, as it seems, popular veneration. As the first missionary king of Norway he was, in the opinion of at least some Norwegian and Icelandic men of letters, worthy of saintly status. This emphasis on Ólafr the evangeliser may explain why his potential as a martyr is not played up. Rather he is cast in the mould of St Vladimir of Rus' (c. 958–1015) and St Stephen of Hungary (c. 975–1038) whose claim to sanctity rested on their role as rulers that championed Christianity within their recently-converted realms. It is therefore not surprising that Nordic and Rus' commentators resorted to similar biblical references when they described these pivotal rulers and their immediate successors. In the words of Oddr Snorrason:

Sua ær at virþa sem Olafr konungr hinn fyrri æfnaði oc setti grunduollinn cristinnar með sinu starfi. En hinn síparri Ólafr reisti ueggi Oc Ólafr T. s. setti uin garðin En hinn helgi Ólafr pryddi hann oc aucaði með miclum avexti.³⁰

We may consider that the first King Olaf prepared and established the foundation of Christianity with his labor, but the latter Olaf raised the wall. Olaf Tryggvason planted the vineyard, but Saint Olaf adorned and increased it with great fruitfulness.³¹

As the *Russian Primary Chronicle* puts it "his father [i.e. Jaroslav's] Vladimir ploughed and harrowed the soil when he enlightened Rus through baptism, while this prince sowed the hearts of the faithful with the written word, and we in turn reap the harvest . . .".³²

King Erik emune of Denmark, murdered by his own courtier at a local assembly in 1137, was another Nordic king noted for his support for the Church.³³ Eight years later a new cathedral in Lund was consecrated and on that occasion (or thereabouts) a new *necrologium*,

³⁰ *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, p. 156.

³¹ *The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason*, p. 102.

³² *The Russian Primary Chronicle. The Laurentian Text*, tr. and ed. by S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. The Medieval Academy of American Publications (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 137.

³³ On Erik emune in the *Liber daticus* see Breengaard 1982, pp. 39–44. Breengaard noticed the martyr-like aspect of the king's death in this work and my interpretation owes much to his analysis.

a calendar to commemorate the dead, was introduced. In this composition, *Liber daticus Lundenses*, the text relating to King Erik, partly defective, reads thus: “*Ericus rex danorum occisus tenens regnum cum summa sui principatus potentia*.”³⁴ A later recension of *Liber daticus* (c. 1270), which may nevertheless reflect an older text,³⁵ adds that King Erik was killed with a lance: “*a proprio satillite lancea perfossus temporalis vite cursum consummavit*.”³⁶ There can be little doubt that the reference to his murder in the *Liber daticus* is intended to evoke the martyrdom of St Knud of Odense, particularly as recounted in the *Tabula Othiniensis*, the earliest description of his martyrdom, where the king is said to have been pierced with a lance at the point of his death.³⁷ Indeed the single sentence dedicated to King Erik emune in the *Liber daticus* captures the essence of the hagiographic schema that one associates with princely martyrs: the betrayal and killing of a just ruler.

In no other medieval source is the king's assassination presented in terms of martyrdom, not even Saxo Grammaticus who otherwise portrays Erik as *rex iustus*. As a point of fact in Sven Aggesen's *Brevis historia regum Dacie*³⁸ and the *Chronicon Roskildense* his murder is seen as a just retribution for his tyrannical reign and overbearing manner. The latter work tells that like God guided the stone that destroyed Goliath he was present in the assassin's spear which killed King Erik.³⁹ But in the eyes of Archbishop Eskil and the canons at Lund Cathedral King Erik emune, a benefactor and a generous patron of the Church,⁴⁰ died a martyr-like death and the day of his murder was to be celebrated with appropriate honours. However, no steps were taken towards his canonization. In 1145 Erik lam was still on the throne and the problem of his succession had not been solved. Accordingly, any move in the direction of recognising Erik emune's

³⁴ *Libri Memoriales Capituli Lundensis. Lunds Domkapitales Gævebøger*, ed. by C. Weeke (Copenhagen, 1884–89), pp. 239–240.

³⁵ See Breengaard 1982, pp. 39–44.

³⁶ *Libri Memoriales*, pp. 332–333.

³⁷ *Vitæ Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 60–62. Which in turn evokes the piercing of Christ on the cross.

³⁸ *Scriptores minores historiæ danicæ medi ævi*, ed. by M. Cl. Gertz, vol. I (København, 1917–18), p. 137.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31. See the comments of Gelting in *Roskildeskroniken*, ed. and transl. by Michael H. Gelting (Højbjerg, 1979), pp. 50–51.

⁴⁰ Christiansen et al. (ed.) 1977, pp. 287–288.

sanctity would have carried with it political implications; it could easily have been interpreted as support for his son, Knud, at the expense of other potential claimants.

In the opinion of Oddr Snorrason and the anonymous author of *Historia Norvegiae*, King Ólafr Tryggvason was worthy of saintly status for his efforts to bring Christianity to Iceland and Norway. For the canons of Lund the assassination of Erik emune echoed the martyrdom of Knud of Odense. In both cases men of letters conferred an aura of sanctity upon secular rulers in the absence of organised cults or, for that matter, popular enthusiasm. In both instances we are confronted with an educated, clerical and cautious attitude towards bestowing sanctity on princely figures. A note has been made of Oddr's apologetic tone and even the author of *Historia Norvegiae*, who at least refers to Ólafr Tryggvason as *beatus*, refrains from elaborating on the issue. Similarly in the *Liber daticus* Erik emune is allotted a semi-saintly status of sorts.⁴¹

This contrasts with other instances where leaders of political factions, pretenders and royal figures were associated with sainthood in the twelfth-century Nordic lands, the background to which was the struggle between opposing branches, or factions, within the ruling dynasties.⁴² In Orkney we have the Páll- and the Erlendr-lines jostling for power and in Denmark the death of King Niels in 1134 triggered a conflict between his direct descendants and the line of Erik emune, a conflict which ended only in 1157 with Valdemar I gaining the throne. In Norway the appearance of Haraldr gilli on the scene, and the death of King Sigurðr in 1130, heralded the beginning of a turbulent period which lasted well into the thirteenth century. The saintly reputation of the secular leaders discussed below must be placed against this political background.

4.3. Orkney: Earl Haraldr ungi

In 1138 Haraldr Maddaðarson, at the tender age of five, succeeded to the earldom of Orkney and for the next two decades or so he

⁴¹ The fact that Archbishop Eskill did not canonize King Erik emune also squares well with his cautious attitude towards the cult of Knud Lavard during the reign of King Erik lam (1137–1146), see ch. 3.3.

⁴² For a disussion of the origin and nature of the Scandinavian civil wars see Sawyer 2003.

shared power with Rögnvaldr Kali. As a consequence of Rögnvaldr's murder in 1158/59 (see ch. 2.4), Haraldr became sole ruler of the earldom, a position he held until his death in 1206.⁴³ With Haraldr Maddaðarson it can be said that the Páll-line of the dynasty had again assumed dominant position in Orkney. A serious threat to Haraldr's rule emerged from the Erlendr-line in 1197/98 when Haraldr Eiríksson ungi, a grandson of Rögnvaldr Kali, made a determined effort to claim his stake in the earldom. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Haraldr ungi had earlier visited King Magnús Erlingsson of Norway and received from him the title of earl along with half the earldom.⁴⁴ His next step was to secure from the king of Scotland, William the Lion, the half of Caithness that Rögnvaldr had possessed.⁴⁵ All this came to nothing for Haraldr Maddaðarson refused to share power with his younger namesake.

OS describes how Haraldr ungi assembled an army and confronted the earl near Wick in Caithness. Haraldr ungi was defeated and killed in the ensuing battle. The saga then adds:

Var þa þegar um nottina set lios mikit, þar er blodit hafdi nidr komit. Þeir kalla iarlinn sannhelgann, ok er þar nu kirkia sem hann fell, ok er hann þar iardadr a nesinu. Ok geraz utöluligar iarteinir fyrir hans verdleik veittar af gudi, ok vitrar þat iafnan, at hann villdi yfir til Orkneyia til Magnus iarls ok Rognvalldz iarlz frænda sinna.⁴⁶

that same night a great light could be seen where his blood had been spilt. People in Caithness think him a true saint and a church stands where he was killed. He was buried there on the headland, and as a result of his virtues, great miracles have been performed by God as a reminder that Haraldr wished to go to Orkney and join his kinsmen, Earl Magnus and Earl Rognvald.⁴⁷

This is the single attestation to Haraldr's saintly reputation; not even the church mentioned has been identified. Still, this passage indicates that following his death Haraldr was the object of cultic ven-

⁴³ On Haraldr Maddaðarson see Topping 1983, pp. 105–120. Thomson 1987, pp. 68–79. Crawford 1976–77, pp. 97–109.

⁴⁴ *OS*, p. 322. Roger of Howden, writing around 1200, states that King Sverrir acknowledged Haraldr as an earl of Orkney. *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, vol. IV, ed. by W. Stubbs. Rolls Series (London, 1871), p. 11.

⁴⁵ *OS*, p. 322.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁴⁷ *The Orkneyinga saga*, pp. 344–345.

eration. It is unlikely, however, that a hagiographical work influenced the saga's description of Haraldr's death and posthumous reputation. Most notably, there is little trace in the account of the narrative features (see ch. 1.4) one associates with martyrdom of secular figures. The focus is indeed less on Haraldr's own conduct and more on the last stand of his two brave retainers.⁴⁸

An answer, if only a tentative one, to the question why Haraldr was considered a saint emerges when we examine the political situation in the region in the last quarter of the twelfth century. The geographical location of the cult is not difficult to account for. *OS* indicates that support for Haraldr ungi came primarily from the people of Caithness and, moreover, that this region had served as an area of recruitment for his military undertakings. It is also worth observing that Haraldr ungi had in all likelihood inherited the lands which his father, Eiríkr stagbrellr, had held in Caithness.⁴⁹ A consideration should also be made of Haraldr Maddaðarson's uneasy relationship with the Scottish Church in this period.⁵⁰ An important feature of King William's expansion into Northern Scotland involved the promotion of bishops to strategically important places. King David had founded a bishopric in Caithness c. 1147 but earlier the authority of the Orkney bishop in the region appears to have gone undisputed. But during the reign of King William the Lion, Scottish bishops began to make their presence felt in Northern Scotland. In 1187, for instance, the king chose a certain John to the bishopric of Caithness. This ecclesiastical expansion northwards undermined the authority of the earls of Orkney and there is evidence that Earl Haraldr made an effort to oppose this process. The climax to Haraldr's acrimonious dealings with the Scottish Church came in 1201 when one of his henchmen tortured and mutilated Bishop John for his dealings with the Scottish king.⁵¹

⁴⁸ In this respect the description is similar to the account of King Knud's martyrdom as presented in *Kinýttlinga saga* where the spotlight is firmly on Knud's brother, Benedict, and his heroic defence. *Danakonunga segur*, pp. 184–196.

⁴⁹ Crawford 1976–77, pp. 108–109.

⁵⁰ Crawford 1995, pp. 134–136. *Idem* 1974, pp. 19–21.

⁵¹ The fact that as late as the nineteenth century the people of Caithness referred to Haraldr Maddaðarson as the “wicked earl” suggests how deep rooted the hostility towards the earl was in this region. Calder 1887, p. 75. I found this reference in Thomson 1987, p. 74.

Thus the political and ecclesiastical situation in Caithness goes some way to provide a plausible background for Haraldr ungi's saintly reputation. For those ecclesiastics hostile to Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson it would have been expedient to promote the sanctity of his namesake and rival.⁵² The whole episode on Haraldr ungi's defeat and death in battle is probably reliant on oral tradition from Caithness. In this context Michael Chesnutt's important study of the last four chapters of *OS*, where the story of Haraldr ungi appears, is of considerable relevance. He concludes that they form a

... coherent and consciously selective account of an unsuccessful attempt on the part of King William the Lion to impose his dominion over the north-east corner of the Scottish mainland. The events are seen through the eyes of that element in the population of Caithness which had committed the political misjudgement of backing the Scottish crown and its ecclesiastical representatives. These representatives were obviously responsible for formulating the two pious interpolations concerning Haraldr *ungi* and Bishop John.⁵³

A cult of Haraldr, even a localised one, would have added legitimacy to their own agenda as well as justified past efforts. Certainly the fact that a church is said to have been built at the site of his death (and possibly dedicated to him) suggests that men of the Church were involved. Moreover, the saga's claim that "Haraldr wished to go to Orkney and join his kinsmen, Earl Magnus and Earl Rognvald" indicates that his posthumous saintly reputation was, at least in the minds of some, associated with the interest of the Erlendr-line of the Orkney ruling dynasty.

4.4. *Denmark: King Knud Magnusson*

Inter-dynastic rivalry also forms the background to the "cult" of King Knud Magnusson. From 1154 Knud had ruled in a triumvirate with Sven Eriksson and Valdemar Knudsson. However, in 1157 Knud was murdered on the orders of King Sven at a meeting of

⁵² Although Haraldr Maddaðarson re-asserted his rule over Caithness following the death of Haraldr ungi, his authority in the region was far from secure. Thus shortly after the battle of Wick King William the Lion recruited Rögnvaldr Guðrøðarson, the king of Man, to subdue Caithness. *OS*, pp. 324–325.

⁵³ Chesnutt 1981, p. 55.

the three kings in Roskilde. Sven's plan to eliminate both his co-rulers on this occasion backfired as Valdemar eluded his grasp. Shortly afterwards Sven was defeated by Valdemar at the battle of Grathehed and killed while attempting to flee.

The Icelandic *Knýtlinga saga*, composed around the middle of the thirteenth century, states that following Knud's murder the Danes considered him a saint.⁵⁴ But the other main sources on the Roskilde meeting, *Gesta Danorum*, the *Roskilde Chronicle*, the *Vita altera* of Knud Lavard and Helmold's *Chronicle of the Slavs*, make no mention of Knud's saintly reputation. Only Sven Aggesen in his *Brevis historia regum Dacie*, written in the late twelfth century, presents the killing of Knud in terms of martyrdom: "When the lights had been snuffed out, they slew Knud and crowned him with martyrdom".⁵⁵ Although the Icelandic author of *Knýtlinga saga* may have been familiar with Danish sources, Saxo's work and annals in particular, he was apparently not acquainted with Sven Aggesen's work.⁵⁶ Thus the two statements relating to Knud's sanctity seem to be independent of each other.

In addition we find the following references in two Swedish annals from the first half of the thirteenth-century:

XCLVI. Obiit beatus Kanutus rex et martyr roskildensis. Sweno rex expulsus est.⁵⁷

XCLVI. Obiit beatus Kanutus rex et martyr roskildensis.⁵⁸

Swedish annals from this period are essentially up-dated versions of imported Danish annals,⁵⁹ and thus the possibility that these references originate in Denmark can not be excluded. Nevertheless, considering

⁵⁴ *Danakonuga sogur*, p. 288.

⁵⁵ *The Works of Sven Aggesen, Twelfth-Century Danish Historian*, tr. with introd. and notes by Eric Christiansen (London, 1992), p. 72. "*Extinctis uero luminaribus Kanutum martyro coronantes interemerunt*". *Scriptores minores*, p. 137. It is possible that a trace of a medieval belief in Knud's sanctity can be found in a Danish historical ballad—preserved in a manuscript from the seventeenth century but "composed" at a much earlier date—where the king is nicknamed "Knud lille" which, as one scholar has pointed out, could be a corrupt form of an earlier epitaph relating to his saintliness, that is "helle" (the holy) or "hille". Svend Grundtvig (ed.) 1862, p. 118. Niels Ahnlund made this suggestion in a footnote to Ahnlund 1948, p. 306.

⁵⁶ Bjarni Guðnason 1976, pp. 55–78. *Danakonunga sogur*, pp. cxiii–clxxix.

⁵⁷ *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* I, p. 23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵⁹ Carlsson and Rosén 1962, pp. 105–106.

that no mention is made of Knud's saintly status in Danish annals, a Swedish provenance for the two references is more likely. The annals' acknowledgement of Knud's sanctity probably reflects his familial ties with Sweden. Knud's grandfather was King Ingi Steinkellsson of Sweden (c. 1080–c. 1110) and his father, Magnus Nielsson, had been elected to the Swedish kingship around 1130.⁶⁰ Moreover, following the death of Magnus in 1133/34, Knud's Polish mother, Rykisa, had married King Sverker of Sweden (c. 1133–c. 1156).⁶¹ It has been suggested that members of the Sverker dynasty, which by the 1160s had been ousted by the Erik-dynasty, upheld the sanctity of Knud Magnusson in opposition to St Erik Jedvardson.⁶² The pieces of the puzzle would fall neatly in place if Knud is identified with the venerated saint referred to by Pope Alexander III in his letter from c. 1170 to (in all likelihood) King Knut Eriksson of Sweden.⁶³

According to Eric Christiansen a close reading of Saxo's work and *Knýtlinga saga* reveals traces, slight in the former but more distinctive in the latter, "of an alternative version of events, a sort of secular passio . . .", that focused on Knud Magnusson and was probably moulded by those who considered him a martyr.⁶⁴ Moreover, it is possible that the author of *Knýtlinga saga* was familiar with a now lost work on Knud.⁶⁵ It has been argued that this hypothetical lost work (whether a biography or a *vita*) on Knud was written in the 1180's in order to promote his sanctity and bolster the claim of the Niels-line to the Danish throne.⁶⁶ In this context the political aspiration of Knud's son, Valdemar who became bishop of Schleswig in the early 1180s, is worthy of consideration. In 1191 Bishop Valdemar fell out with his namesake, the king, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Valdemar Knudsson then fled the country, declared himself

⁶⁰ Saxo Grammaticus . . . Vol. I, XIII, v, p. 129.

⁶¹ Sawyer 1989, pp. 36–38.

⁶² See Westman 1954, p. 80.

⁶³ This was first suggested by Ahnlund 1948, pp. 305–311. On Alexander's letter see Jönsson 1991, pp. 331–346.

⁶⁴ Saxo Grammaticus. *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia*. Books X–XVI. The text of the first edition with translation and commentary in three volumes by Eric Christiansen. Vol. III: Books XIV, XV and XVI, text and translation, tables and maps. British Archaeological Report (International Series) 118 (i) 1981, p. 767.

⁶⁵ Malmros 1979, pp. 42–66.

⁶⁶ Kristiansen 1968–69, pp. 431–452.

king, and mustered an army in both Sweden and Norway. The following year the Danish royal forces crushed the rebellion and Bishop Valdemar was imprisoned, thus terminating his aspirations for the throne.⁶⁷ Before this turn of events, however, it was clearly in his interest to uphold the sanctity of his father as a counterweight to the cult of King Valdemar's father, St Knud Lavard. One can only guess that contemporaries grasped the parallels between the fate of the two, both betrayed and killed by their own cousins.

The political situation in Denmark was not favourable for a formal recognition of a cult of Knud Magnusson. Since Valdemar's victory over Sven Eriksson grathe in 1157, Knud's branch of the royal family, the Niels-line, had effectively been excluded from the throne.⁶⁸ In order to further the cult ecclesiastical support was essential and although Eskil had been favourable to Knud,⁶⁹ the archbishop was unable, or more likely unwilling, to take any steps towards recognising Knud's sanctity, as he eventually did in the case of Knud Lavard. In brief, neither Church nor Crown was willing to support a cult of King Knud Magnusson.

Nevertheless it should be noted that in the closing decades of the twelfth century a member of the Niels-line did become the object of an organised cult.⁷⁰ In 1180 Niels, son of Knud Magnusson, died of natural causes and was buried in a small chapel in the town of Århus and not long afterwards work commenced on a cathedral at the same site. Niels was first and foremost the local saint of Århus and to an extent also of eastern Jutland where churches were dedicated to him. In the mid-thirteenth century the Århus clergy made an unsuccessful attempt to have Niels canonized by the papacy and a *De vita et miraculis B. Nicholai Arusiensis* was composed in his honour.⁷¹ In this respect the cult of Niels can be compared to that of Earl Rögnvaldr of Orkney: the sanctity of both was promoted by ecclesiastics

⁶⁷ Olrik 1943, pp. 41–44. It has been suggested that Valdemar himself was responsible for writing a Life of his father. Christiansen 1981, p. 60.

⁶⁸ Fenger 1989, p. 141.

⁶⁹ Koch 1950, p. 153.

⁷⁰ It has been argued that to begin with there may have been a political dimension to the cult of Niels. Like the case of Knud Magnusson it was obviously in the interest of Bishop Valdemar to promote the sanctity of his uncle. However, the cult was soon "de-politicised". See Paludan 1988, pp. 41–53. For an overview of Niels' cult throughout the ages see Søgaard 1979.

⁷¹ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 398–406.

in order to add lustre to a particular religious center, the newly-founded cathedrals of Århus and Kirkwall. Thus the case of Niels Knudsson represents another cult of a native prince, or a member of a ruling house, being appropriated by an aspiring bishopric.

4.5. *Norway: Two Kings and Two Pretenders*

Haraldr gilli

Following the death of Sigurðr Magnússon in 1130 the Norwegian kingdom was divided between his son, Magnús, and the upstart Haraldr gilli.⁷² Sometime in the 1120s the latter had arrived at the court of King Sigurðr from Ireland and, in a trial by fire, “proved” that he was the son of King Magnús berfættr. In return for recognising his royal ancestry, Haraldr vowed not to claim the throne while Magnús was alive. Haraldr gilli reneged on this agreement and for three years he co-ruled the kingdom with Magnús Sigurðarson. But the relationship between the two soon turned sour and in 1134 they fought a battle at Fyrilev where Magnús emerged victorious. Haraldr fled to Denmark where he was well received by King Erik emune who supplied him with necessary provisions for a return to Norway. In Bergen at the beginning of 1135 Haraldr and his followers ambushed and mutilated King Magnús.

Haraldr was not to enjoy sole rulership in Norway in comfort. The following year Sigurðr slembir, another pretender who claimed to be Magnús berfættr’s son) appeared on the scene and killed Haraldr. Although Sigurðr was able to secure the kingship for himself, his attempt to secure the throne proved in vain because prominent men of the realm rallied behind King Haraldr’s two sons. The two-year old Ingi was elected to kingship by the people of Viken while those of Trøndelag chose the four-year old Sigurðr. In the context of this study it is the reason provided in *Heimskringla* for this relatively smooth succession that captures the eye:

⁷² For a general outline of the political history of Norway in this period see Helle 1974, pp. 20–48. Krag 2000, pp. 103–126.

Ok snørisk undir þá bræðr nálíga allr lýðr ok allra helzt fyrir þess sakar, at faðir þeira var kallaðr heilagr, ok var þeim svá land svarit, at undir engan mann annan skyldi ganga, meðan nokkur þeira lifði sona Haralds konungs.⁷³

Afterwards the whole nation almost submitted to the brothers and principally because their father was considered holy; and the country took the oath to them, that the kingly power should not go to any other man as long as any of King Harald's sons was alive.⁷⁴

As with his Orcadian namesake, only a single reference attests to Haraldr gilli's saintly reputation. It should be noted, however, that Haraldr is a candidate for being the false saint whom Pope Alexander III refers to in his aforementioned letter.⁷⁵ The pope forbids the veneration of a figure that had died drunk in the presence of his mistress. According to *Heimskringla*, Haraldr died after a feast in the presence of his concubine⁷⁶ and thus expired in circumstances that echo the death of the false saint mentioned in the papal letter.⁷⁷

Although the sons of Haraldr succeeded him, no attempt appears to have been made to have his sanctity officially recognised. *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* simply state that he was buried in the older Christ Church in Bergen.⁷⁸ Of course the great profile and prestige of St Ólafr's cult may help to explain Haraldr's short-lived association with saintliness; that there simply was no scope for another royal saint in Norway in this period. This is not altogether a satisfactory argument for if the very notion of Haraldr's sanctity could surface in Norway in the mid 1130s, surely an official recognition of some sort was not inconceivable, especially with his three sons on the throne. One aspect that may be of some relevance here is the uneasy relationship in the 1130s and 1140s between the Norwegian kings, in particular Haraldr gilli, and leading ecclesiastics.⁷⁹ Most notably, Icelandic

⁷³ *Heimskringla* III, p. 303. This is not mentioned in *Fagrskinna*, the other main source for these events, *Ágrip*, pp. 340–341.

⁷⁴ *Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla*. Part Three, p. 341.

⁷⁵ This was suggested by Beckman 1912, p. 42. On various hypotheses relating to the identity of the murdered king referred to in this passage see Jónsson 1991, pp. 331–344.

⁷⁶ *Ágrip*, p. 328. *Heimskringla* III, p. 301.

⁷⁷ The passage relating to the drunken saint is quoted in full in Jónsson 1991, p. 333.

⁷⁸ *Ágrip*, p. 341. *Heimskringla* III, p. 302.

⁷⁹ See Johnsen 1965, pp. 47–48.

sources tell that in 1135 Haraldr gilli had Reinald, the English bishop of Stavanger, hanged when he refused to hand over a treasure which the king suspected the bishop of possessing.⁸⁰ Assuming that the establishment of a princely cult called for close co-operation between the two authorities, the brief saintly reputation of King Haraldr gilli is scarcely surprising. Another, and probably more important, reason for Haraldr's fleeting association with saintliness is of a more straightforward nature. For those who wished to see the sons of Haraldr on the throne, any cause that would rally support for Ingi and Sigurðr was welcomed. In the precarious circumstances following Haraldr's death his saintly reputation could only help to legitimise the succession of his sons.⁸¹ After the election of the brothers to kingship in 1137, and the subsequent consolidation of their authority, there was little incentive to futher a cult of their father.

Sigurðr slembir

As noted, Haraldr gilli was killed by the pretender Sigurðr Magnússon slembir (d. 1139) whose colourful story is recounted in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and the compilations *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*.⁸² The most detailed account is found in the first-named work, more precisely in *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*. The saga relates that Magnús was raised up in Norway by a priest and the daughter of a local nobleman from Trøndelag. His mother told the young Sigurðr that his biological father was none other than King Magnús berfættir of Norway (d. 1103). Thus informed, Sigurðr, who had by that time attained the order of deacon, left his homeland and embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On his return he visited Scotland and attended the court of King David I. From there Sigurðr travelled to Orkney and joined the retinue of Haraldr Hákonarson and, as told by *OS*, he aided the Orkney earl in killing a certain Þorkell Sumarliðason. As a punishment for this deed Sigurðr was outlawed

⁸⁰ *Ágrip*, p. 326. *Heimskringla* III, pp. 288–289.

⁸¹ There is a certain parallel here with the situation after the death of Edward the Confessor. It has been argued that a belief in his sanctity emerged in circles that opposed Harold Godwinson, see John 1979, p. 174. See also Keynes 1999 A, pp. 237–238.

⁸² *Heimskringla* III, pp. 297–320. *Morkinskinna*, pp. 405–438. *Ágrip*, pp. 326–334.

from the earldom at the instigation of Earl Páll, Earl Haraldr's co-ruler and eventual successor.⁸³

According to *Heimskringla*, when Sigurðr revealed to Haraldr gilli that he was of royal blood the king ignored his claim and confronted him with the killing of Þorkell. In response to this turn of events Sigurðr and his followers murdered King Haraldr in the summer of 1136.⁸⁴ In order to add legitimacy to his undertaking and rally more people to his cause, Sigurðr brought back from Denmark the dethroned king of Norway, Magnús blindi. In a similar manner as Erik emune had earlier helped Haraldr gilli to overthrow the same Magnús, the Danish king now backed Sigurðr against the sons of Haraldr, King Ingi and King Sigurðr. When this plan was thwarted Magnús and Sigurðr, with Danish assistance, harried the coast of Norway for a number of years until they, along with their Danish allies, were defeated in battle in 1139 by the combined forces of Ingi and Sigurðr. The Old Norse sources inform us that before his death Sigurðr withstood gruesome torture with utmost courage and fortitude. Regarding Sigurðr slembir's burial *Heimskringla* tells the following:

En vinir Sigurðar fóru síðan eptir líkinu ór Danmörku sunnan með skip ok færðu til Álaborgar ok grófu at Mariukirkju þar í býnum. Svá sagði Eiríki Ketill prófastr, er varðveitti Mariukirkju, at Sigurðr væri þar grafinn.⁸⁵

But Sigurðr's friends then went south to Denmark to fetch the corpse there and brought it to Ålborg and buried it at St Mary's Church in that town. Thus Provost Ketil, who kept St Mary's Church in that town, told Erik that Sigurðr was buried there.⁸⁶

The transportation of Sigurðr's earthly remains to Denmark reflects his close relationship with the Danish kings and, in fact, the town of Ålborg, appears to have been a base for Sigurðr and his followers in the winter of 1137.

Snorri Sturluson informs that his principal source for these events is a now lost work entitled *Hryggjarstykki* by the Icelander Eiríkr Oddsson.⁸⁷ As regards Sigurðr's career the authors/compilers of

⁸³ OS, pp. 123–125.

⁸⁴ *Heimskringla* III, pp. 301–302.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁸⁶ My own translation.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 319–320.

Morkinskinna and *Fagrskinna* also seem to have used Eiríkr's work. Bjarni Guðnason studied in detail the remnants of *Hryggjarstykki* in a monograph entitled *Fyrsta sagan* (i.e. the "First saga") which, as the title suggests, emphasises the work's potentially pivotal position in the earliest stage of Icelandic Kings' saga writing.⁸⁸ Bjarni argued that *Hryggjarstykki* was written around the mid-twelfth century and not c. 1170 as most scholars had assumed up to that point and, moreover, that the original form of the saga had been a biography of Sigurðr Magnússon rather than a general history of the Norwegian kings in the first half of the twelfth century.

Eiríkr Oddsson was not the only medieval authority to deal with Sigurðr slembir and his fate. In book fourteen of Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, Sigurðr's suffering is conveyed in a manner which would not be out place in a *passio*.⁸⁹ Saxo may here have been following Icelandic sources,⁹⁰ although it is also possible that he relied on a tradition that circulated among Sigurðr's former followers and was preserved by the clergy of St Mary's in Ålborg.⁹¹ The first, however, to tell the life-story of Sigurðr in some shape or form was Ívarr Ingimundarson in his *Sigurðarbálkr*, a skaldic poem composed shortly after the death of its hero.⁹²

Bjarni Guðnason argued that when Eiríkr wrote the biography of Sigurðr he was influenced by hagiography, more specifically by Master Robert's Life of St Magnús.⁹³ He wrote: "A number of aspects that are highlighted in this investigation suggest that Eiríkr Oddsson knew and used the *Vita* of St Magnús when he told about the torture of Sigurður".⁹⁴ Following the scholarly consensus at the time, Bjarni Guðnason assumed that Robert's Latin Life of Magnús had been written c. 1137. Accordingly it could have been known to Eiríkr when he composed his *Hryggjarstykki* a decade or so later. Although

⁸⁸ Bjarni Guðnason 1978.

⁸⁹ Thus Sigurðr makes a public confession, receives his tortures as a penance and reads aloud from the psalter while they are performed on him. Saxo Grammaticus, Vol. II, IV, xxix, p. 468.

⁹⁰ Bjarni Guðnason 1978, pp. 54–60.

⁹¹ Saxo Grammaticus, Vol. III, pp. 808–809.

⁹² *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning 800–1200 A*, pp. 495–502.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 104–110. This theory is also mentioned in Knirk 1993, p. 363.

⁹⁴ "Ýmis atriði, sem dregin eru fram í þessari rannsókn, benda til þess, að Eiríkr Oddsson hafi þekkt og stuðst við *Vita* hins sæla Magnúss, þegar hann sagði frá þíningu Sigurðar". Bjarni Guðnason 1979, p. 105. My own translation.

Bjarni's hypothesis is somewhat weakened by the absence of clear textual correspondence between *Hryggjarstykki* and the Magnús corpus,⁹⁵ the two share some general characteristics in relation to the execution of the main protagonists. Most notably, both face their death in a martyr-like fashion. Sigurðr has his request for a priest attending his execution denied and he undergoes torture with calmness of mind, singing the psalms, and finally expires with a prayer on his lips.⁹⁶ Both Sigurðr and Magnús pray for the souls of their enemies. But these features, as Bjarni readily acknowledges, are hardly peculiar to the Life of St Magnús. Sigurðr's stoicism and otherworldly response in face of cruel death bears the hallmark of a type of death-scene, well attested in Old Norse literature, in which manliness and martyr-like behaviour distinguish the hero's last hour.⁹⁷

A scene from the Icelandic *Guðmundar saga dýra*, composed c. 1220 and later incorporated into the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, serves as an illustrative example of this. The saga is a detailed, if somewhat disjointed, account of disputes, mostly involving the local chieftain Guðmundar dýri, which took place in the north of Iceland between c. 1184 and 1217.⁹⁸ In a scene that describes the execution of supporters of Guðmundr in the year 1198, we encounter some of the elements which distinguish the martyrdom of St Magnús of Orkney.⁹⁹ Four men—Hákon Þórðarson and three brothers, the so-called Arnþrúðarsynir—are trapped inside a farmstead which the attackers have set ablaze. Hákon asks for and is granted safe conduct (*"gríð"*) from the burning house. When he steps outside he eschews the possibility of seeking safe-haven in a church nearby on the grounds that his attackers have already granted him *gríð*. The parallels to the conduct of Magnús in *OS* are noteworthy. The Orkney earl leaves the

⁹⁵ There is a certain textual correspondence between passages in *Morkinskinna* and in *OS* relating to the pilgrimages of Sigurðr and Hákon to Jerusalem: "*Oc eptir þetta for S. vt ilond byriabi ferþ sina til Roms. oc allt for hann vt til Iorsala lanz oc Iordanar. oc sotti helga doma þa sem palmarom er titit*". *Morkinskinna*, pp. 407–408. "*Þeiri ferþ for hann [i.e. Hákon] ut til Iorsala, sotti þangat helga doma ok laugahiz i anni Iordan, sva sem siþr er palmara*". *OS*, p. 121. In any case, the passage in *OS* refers to Hákon Pálsson not Magnús and, although it appears in *MSL*, it probably stems from the original version of *OS* rather than Robert's *Vita*.

⁹⁶ *Heimskringla* III, pp. 319–20. *Morkinskinna*, p. 437.

⁹⁷ Cormack 1994, pp. 187–219.

⁹⁸ On executions in general in *Sturlunga saga* see Guðrún Nordal 1998, pp. 203–211.

⁹⁹ *Sturlunga saga* I–II, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Oxford, 1878) I, pp. 160–162.

sanctuary of the church and thus puts his faith in the good-will of Hákon Pálsson. When two of the Arnþrúðarsynir prepare for their execution they “washed their hands and combed their hair, as though they were going to a feast”.¹⁰⁰ As mentioned earlier (see p. 59), Magnús behaved before his execution as though he was “going to a wedding . . .”. Magnús presented Hákon with three choices instead of having him killed. Firstly, that he would go on a pilgrimage to Rome and never return. Secondly he offered to be mutilated and imprisoned in Scotland and, finally, to be blinded and placed in a dark cell for the remainder of his life. Hákon Þórðarson has two requests declined before his execution. Firstly, to have a leg and a hand amputated and embark on a pilgrimage to Rome. Secondly, that he be thrust through with a spear rather than hacked to death with a sword. On Egilsay Hákon’s retainer refuses to carry out the execution. In *Guðmundar saga dýra* no one volunteers (and one refuses) to execute Hákon Þórðarson. Moreover, Earl Magnús gives his tunic to the executioner while Hákon presents his sword to one of those present. The echoes between the scene in *Guðmundar saga dýra* and St Magnús’ martyrdom are undeniable. The point to make, however, is that Icelandic authors were inclined, on particular occasions, to describe the killing or execution of secular figures, even minor ones, in terms which evoked or resembled the martyrdom of established saints.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ “Þógu sér ok kembðu, ok bjoggusk sem til fagnaðar væri at fara”. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁰¹ A notable example of this appears in *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (mid-thirteenth century) which tells of an Icelandic chieftain from Vestfirðir who was killed in 1213 by a rival magnate. Hrafn is portrayed as a just chieftain who treats those under his protection with generosity and fairness. Þorvaldr Snorrason, his adversary, is cast in the mould of the devil’s henchman whose envy of the popular Hrafn is fuelled by slanderers. At the end of the saga Þorvaldr and his band of followers surprise Hrafn at his homestead and execute him. In both general setting and specific detail the scene of Hrafn’s death echoes the martyrdom of St Magnús. *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, pp. lxi–lxxiv. As with the Orcadian saint, Hrafn prays shortly before his capture, receives *corpus domini* prior to the execution, and offers his adversary three choices to consider. The first offer is almost identical to the one Magnús presents to Hákon, to go on a pilgrimage to Rome and never return. As with Hákon on Egilsay, the first companion, Þorvaldr, asked to carry out the execution declined the invitation while the second one obeys his order. Finally, as in the Magnús corpus, green grass grows at the site of the execution where none had grown before. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–43. The parallels between the two works are no coincidence for it has been shown that the author of *Hrafn saga* was probably influenced by Master Robert’s Life of St Magnús and a biography of Thomas Becket, most likely that of Robert of Cricklade. Possibly the author had access to a manuscript

Bjarni Guðnason's conclusion that Robert's Life of St Magnús influenced the death-scene of Sigurðr slembir in *Hryggjarstykki* is not altogether convincing. Whereas in *Guðmundar saga dýra* we encounter elements that make the martyrdom of Magnús distinctive—the Church as a sanctuary, the proposals before the execution, the giving away of worldly possessions—the death-scene of Sigurðr Magnússon slembir, as described in the Kings' sagas, represents a fairly typical presentation of an heroic death painted with hagiographic colours. The mere fact that a Life of St Magnús probably existed around the middle of the twelfth century seems have been the main reason for bringing it to attention in this context.

This does not deflect from Bjarni's interesting suggestion that King Erik emune upheld the saintliness of the Norwegian pretender in order to strengthen the opposition against the sons of Haraldr gilli.

that contained both Robert's work on the Canterbury saint and on St Magnús of Orkney. At the very least he saw it fitting to allude to these two twelfth-century martyrs in relation to his own story of the death of an Icelandic chieftain. *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, pp. xx–xxvi. (But the possibility cannot be ruled out that Magnús' martyrdom was only known to the author of *Hrafn saga* via OS. Foote 1992, pp. 63–70). Although no cultic evidence attests to the veneration of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, the attitude of his anonymous biographer should not be overlooked. He, at least, considered this chieftain from Vestfirðir worthy of saintly status and with that sentiment as a guiding light he composed *Hrafn saga* (on the saga being composed for the purpose of supporting Hrafn's sanctity, see Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2004). It is more than possible that the saga's portrayal of this regional chieftain reflects the attitude of those who had enjoyed Hrafn's patronage. In any case it is hard to disassociate the composition of the saga from the on-going civil strife in thirteenth-century Iceland. The peaceful, wise and just chieftain is upheld as a model ruler in an age notably lacking in these qualities. In this light Hrafn's semi-saintly status and innocent martyrdom at the hands of an aggressive and overbearing adversary can be seen as a response to the general political climate at the time of the saga's writing. The idealised portrayal of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson in the separate saga could hardly have failed to have a topical resonance in a period when the personal ambitions and factional rivalry were undermining the foundations of the Icelandic Commonwealth. Within this broader context the portrayal of Hrafn as a martyr becomes more comprehensible. A case of a secular leader being associated with sanctity in absence of a cult can be found in Dudo of Saint-Quentin's early chronicle on the dukes of Normandy. In this work, composed in the late tenth or early eleventh century, Count William Longsword's assassination in 942 is described as martyrdom. Like St Magnús, William is betrayed by a political rival, Arnulf of Flanders, at a peace meeting. *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum Sancti Quintini decano*, ed. by Jules Lair (Caen, 1865), p. 179. On Dudo's reasons for describing Duke William in such terms see Jordan 1991, pp. 53–62. Underlying Dudo's account is a *Planctus*, a lament, composed shortly after William's death. For the text of this poem see *Étude sur la vie et la mort de Guillaume Longue-épée, duc de Normandie*, ed. by Jules Lair (Paris, 1893), pp. 81–93.

In this undertaking Sigurðr was seemingly supported by notable people in Denmark and, moreover, some Icelanders are known to have followed him. In brief, Eiríkr Oddsson, who undoubtedly received some of his information from the supporters of Sigurðr, composed *Hryggjarstykki* to promote the sanctity of a fallen pretender.¹⁰²

Ólafr Guðbrandsson ógæfa

In further support of this hypothesis a note can be made of the case of Ólafr ógæfa (d. 1173), another unsuccessful pretender to the Norwegian throne with Danish connections. *Fagrskinna* tells that in the late 1160s Ólafr, the grandson of King Eysteinn Magnússon (d. 1123), spearheaded a revolt against King Magnús Erlingsson and his father Erlingr skakki. His uprising coincided with King Valdemar's effort to gain a foothold in southern Norway and it is highly plausible, albeit un-provable, that the Norwegian pretender and the Danish king co-ordinated their moves in a campaign against King Magnús and his father. Although Ólafr attracted substantial support, his bid for the throne terminated in 1169 when he and his band of followers were defeated. Ólafr himself survived the battle and fled to Denmark where, in 1173, he died of natural causes. Ólafr was buried in the episcopal town of Ålborg and subsequently, according to *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, the Danes considered him a saint: "*kalla Danir hann helgan*".¹⁰³

Thus Ólafr followed in the footsteps of Sigurðr Magnússon: both were pretenders to the Norwegian throne, both were apparently supported by the Danish kings and were laid to rest in the town of Ålborg in north-eastern Jutland. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Ólafr and Sigurðr were buried in the same church, St Mary's, which had been built in the early twelfth century.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that by the middle of the twelfth century St Mary's served as a church for a nunnery which had been established somewhat earlier.¹⁰⁵ Therefore it is not far-fetched to envisage that the memory, and perhaps cults, of the two pretenders was promoted by a newly-established monastic community.

¹⁰² Bjarni Guðnason 1978, pp. 110–125.

¹⁰³ *Agrip*, p. 358. *Heimskringla* III, p. 410.

¹⁰⁴ Johansen et al. 1992, pp. 268–271.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

King Eysteinn Haraldsson and Þorleifr breiðskeggr

In 1142 a group of powerful magnates brought Eysteinn, the third son of Haraldr gilli, to Norway from Scotland. The people of Trøndelag recognized Eysteinn's right to kingship and his brother accepted his claim to a third of the kingdom.¹⁰⁶ When the three brothers came of age, however, a power struggle ensued. Their relationship deteriorated rapidly and in 1154/55 Eysteinn and Sigurðr joined forces in an attempt to oust Ingi from the triumvirate. However, Ingi and his powerful supporter, Gregoríus Dagsson, were not taken by surprise and this initial round of inter-dynastic strife culminated in 1156 with the killing of King Sigurðr in Bergen. Two years later the armies of Ingi and Eysteinn met in the Viken region. Eysteinn did not consider battle a feasible option and he fled into the woods where he was caught by a certain Símun skálpr, a supporter of King Ingi. Snorri Sturluson describes the execution in the following manner:

Konungr bað, at hann skyldi hlýða messu áðr [i.e. before he is executed], ok þat var. Síðan lagðisk hann niðr á grúfu og breiddi hendr frá sér út ok bað sik hoggva í kross á milli herðanna, kvað þá skyldu reyna, hvárt hann mundi þola járn eða eigi, sem þeir höfðu sagt lagsmenn Inga. Símun mælti við þann, er hoggva skyldi, bað hann til ráða, kvað konung hólzi lengi hafa kropit þar um lyng. Hann var þá hoggvinn ok þótti verða við þrúðliga. Lík hans var flutt til Fors, en fyrir sunnan kirkju undir brekkunni var lík hans náttsett. Eysteinn konungr var jarðaðr at Forskirkju, ok er leg hans á miðju kirkjugólfi ok breiddr yfir kógur, ok kalla menn hann helgan. Þar sem hann var hoggvinn ok blóð hans kom á jörð, spratt upp brunnr, en annarr þar undir brekkunni, sem lík hans var náttsett. Af hváru tveggja því vatni flykkjask margir menn bót hafa fengit. þat er sagn Víkverja, at margar jarteinir yrði at leiði Eysteins konungs, áðr óvinir hans steypði á leiðit hundssóði.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Heimskringla* III, p. 321. *Ágrip*, pp. 334–335. *Morkinskinna*, p. 440.

¹⁰⁷ *Heimskringla* III, p. 345. In his description of the execution Snorri appears to have followed *Fagrskinna* (or, alternatively, both were following a now lost source), *Ágrip*, p. 340. *Heimskringla* is on the other hand the only source that mentions Eysteinn's saintly reputation. At the end of the chapter that tells of Eysteinn's execution, Snorri refers to a work composed on the orders of King Sverrir Sigurðarson: "*Svá hefir Sverrir konungr ritat látit*". *Heimskringla* III, p. 346. It is not clear whether Snorri is implying here which the whole episode derives from this work or only the information that King Ingi refused to intervene when he heard of Símun's capture of his brother (although from the context the latter option appears more likely). Nothing is otherwise known about this work. *Ibid.*, pp. lxiii–lxiv.

Then the king begged that he might hear mass before he died, which accordingly took place. Then Eystein laid himself down on his face on the grass, stretched out his hands on each side, and told them to cut the sign of the cross between his shoulders and see whether he could not bear steel as King Inge's followers had asserted of him. Simon told the man who had to put the king to death to do so immediately, for the king had been creeping about upon the grass long enough. He was accordingly slain, and he appears to have suffered manfully. His body was carried to Fors, and lay all night under the hill at the south side of the church. King Eystein was buried in Fors church, and his grave is in the middle of the church floor, where a fringed canopy is spread over it, and he is considered a saint. Where he was executed, and his blood ran upon the ground, sprang up a fountain, and another under the hill where his body lay all night. From both these waters many think they have received a cure of sickness and pain. It is reported by the Viken people that many miracles were wrought at King Eystein's grave, until his enemies poured upon it soup made of boiled dogs' flesh.¹⁰⁸

As with his father, Eysteinn's conduct during his life-time scarcely qualified him for sainthood. In the saga sources he is hardly portrayed as a medieval *rex iustus* or a likely saint: "King Eystein was dark and dingy in complexion, of middle height, and a prudent man; but what deprived him of consideration and popularity with those under him were his avarice and narrowness".¹⁰⁹ If Reginald of Durham is to be believed, Eysteinn's treatment of monasteries and relic-shrines on his viking-style expedition to the British Isles in 1151 does not easily square with his later reputation of sanctity.¹¹⁰ His reportedly harsh treatment of the people of Viken should also be noted.¹¹¹ Still, this region appears to have been his main power-base and there, according to Snorri, a belief in his sainthood arose.¹¹² Again we can

¹⁰⁸ Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*. Part Three, p. 372.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 362. "Eysteinn konungur var svartr maðr ok dökklitaðr, heldr hár meðalmaðr, vitr maðr ok skynsamr, en þat dró mest ríki undan honum, er hann var sínkr ok fjögjarn". *Heimskringla* III, p. 331.

¹¹⁰ Reginald of Durham, *De admirandis virtutibus B. Cuthberti*. The Publication of the Surtees Society (London, 1835), pp. 65–66.

¹¹¹ *Heimskringla* III, p. 326.

¹¹² Helle 1974, p. 33. It must however be emphasised that it is difficult to find any clear cut regional divisions in the Norwegian Civil War, at least until the last quarter of the twelfth century. Bagge 1986, pp. 156–65. *Ibid.* 1999, pp. 299–320. The killing of Eysteinn—like that of Magnús, Knud Lavard and Knud Magnusson—could also have been presented, by his supporters, as an act of betrayal. Simun skálpr was married to a sister of King Eysteinn and had taken his side in the dispute

only guess that the cult was promoted by Eysteinn's supporters for the purpose of holding the faction together after the fall of their leader. That his enemies felt threatened by his cult is indicated by their efforts to eradicate it,¹¹³ and indeed belief in Eysteinn's sanctity appears to have taken roots in folk-culture. As late as the nineteenth century a spring, located near the place of his execution, was known by the name of "*St Østens kilde*", that is "St Eysteinn's spring".¹¹⁴ This, of course, accords well with *Heimskringla*'s claim that two healing springs were associated with the locations where Eysteinn was killed and his body kept the following night. Clearly Snorri Sturluson was recording here a local tradition.

Following the death of King Magnús Erlingsson at the battle of Fimreiti in 1184, Sverrir Sigurðarson became the sole ruler of Norway. But his position was far from secure. From 1196 to his death in 1202 Sverrir was in conflict with a faction, the so-called *Böglungar* (or *Baglar*) that aimed to bring the sons of Magnús Erlingsson to the throne. There were also earlier, less serious, challenges to Sverrir's rule. Only a year after King Magnús' death a certain Jón, the son of king Ingi Haraldsson, was elected to kingship by the people of Viken.¹¹⁵ Jón and his army of followers (known by the name of *Kúflungar*) were defeated by Sverrir in 1188.¹¹⁶ Of greater interest in the context of this study is another, somewhat obscure, pretender to the throne who has a brief stand-in part in *Sverris saga*.¹¹⁷ The saga

with his brothers before he switched to King Ingi's camp. *Heimskringla* III, p. 332, p. 343. It is worth noting that Einar Skúlason's *Eysteinsdrápa*, composed shortly after Eysteinn's death, emphasises Símun's betrayal. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I, p. 475.

¹¹³ As observed earlier a similar method was reportedly used to eradicate the cult of Knud Lavard. *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 201–202.

¹¹⁴ Daae 1879, p. 192. However, the possibility that the spring is named after Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson cannot be ruled out entirely.

¹¹⁵ *Sverris Saga*, p. 108.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 121–122. According to the prologue of *Sverris saga* the first part of the work was written under the supervision of King Sverrir himself (probably between 1185 and 1188) by Karl Jónsson, a former abbot of Þingeyrar monastery. *Sverris Saga*, p. 1. There has been much scholarly debate about at what point this first part terminates although most scholars agree that Abbot Karl is only responsible for the first thirty or forty chapters of the saga, i.e. up to the death of Earl Erlingr skakki in 1179. The rest was then written in the period between Sverrir's death in 1202 and c. 1230. For an overview of this problem see Bagge 1996, pp. 15–19. The fundamental textual study of the work is still Holm-Olsen 1953.

tells that around 1190 a certain Þorleifr breiðskeggr, a former monk, entered the political scene and presented himself as the son of Eysteinn Haraldsson.

Þat sama sumar er iarll hafði andaz var floccr a Mœrcum austr. En firir þesom flocki var sa maðr er callaðr var Þorleifr breiðscegr oc væri son Eysteins konungs Haralds-sonar oc þat til iartegna at a meðal herða honom var eyr groit i cros. . . .¹¹⁸

The summer that Earl Eirik died, a band arose east in the Marches under the leadership of a man called Þorleifr breiðskeggr; he was said to be a son of King Eysteinn Haraldsson, and as a sign of this he bore between his shoulders the scar of a wound healed in the shape of a cross.¹¹⁹

The saga also reports that Þorleifr was considered a wise man and “so moral that his life resembled a monk’s life, subject to the rules of his order, more than a layman’s”.¹²⁰ A poem in the saga refutes and mocks this belief:

Bjort kveða brenna kerti
Breiðscegs yfir leiði.
Lios veit ec at mvn misa
meir hofþingi þeira.
Vitum at vanir betri,
ver hugðumc því brugðuz.¹²¹

It is said that over Breiðskegg’s grave now burn bright candles. I know that their chieftain will miss a still brighter light. We know that often better hopes than these have failed.¹²²

These lines allude to attempts to uphold Þorleifr’s sanctity. The poet denies the claims of Þorleifr’s supporters that the killed pretender was a saint. In this respect his cult can be compared with that of Earl Haraldr ungi of Orkney; in both instances it appears that followers of failed political causes cultivated the saintly reputation of their leaders. Although Ludvig Daae’s information that in the sixteenth century there had been a chapel dedicated to Þorleifr in the

¹¹⁸ *Sverris Saga*, p. 121.

¹¹⁹ My own translation.

¹²⁰ “oc þat at hann væri sva vel siðaðr at hans lif væri lícara munca reglu en leic-manna”. *Sverris Saga*, pp. 121–122.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 122. I have amended the spelling a bit here.

¹²² My own translation.

Marker region is possibly suspect,¹²³ a genuine folkloric tradition attests to a “Tollefskjeld” (Þorleifr’s spring) in the same region.¹²⁴ It is reasonably clear that we are dealing here with localised cults that emerged in the wake of military defeats of political factions and the killing of their leaders. Such cults could provide both a focal point for further struggle as well as justifying past efforts; an obvious, if somewhat grander, comparative case from the English scene is the manner in which supporters of the baronial revolt against Henry III approached the cult of their leader, Earl Simon de Montfort (d. 1265).¹²⁵

Although there is not much more to say on the political background to the cults of Eysteinn and Þorleifr, there are still aspects worth noting in relation to the manner in which the Old Norse sources present their deaths and posthumous reputations.¹²⁶ The tone of Eysteinn’s execution-scene should be a familiar one to readers of Old Norse literature. Confronted with imminent death the main protagonist, in this case King Eysteinn Haraldsson, keeps his composure and, for good measure, taunts his executioner with a sharp remark. It hardly needs emphasising that the ability to leave this world manfully, preferably with some witticism on the lips, was a particularly potent way of expressing manhood in medieval Norse society. In brief, Eysteinn is seen to conduct himself in a manner that befits a king and martyr.

The “royal” dimension of Eysteinn’s conduct at his execution is borne out by his request to the executioner to “*hoggva í kross á meðal herðanna*”, “to cut the sign of the cross between his shoulders”. In his study *The Royal Touch* Marc Bloch discusses the medieval belief that those rightly born to kingship had a birthmark upon their bodies as a proof of their status.¹²⁷ The most common sign is the cross,

¹²³ Daae 1879, p. 193. See the observations of Røkeness 2004, pp. 68–69.

¹²⁴ Røkeness 2004, p. 69.

¹²⁵ Maddicot 1990, pp. 641–653. For such cults in late medieval England in general see Theilmann 1990, McKenna 1970, 608–611.

¹²⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this aspect see Haki Antonsson 2001.

¹²⁷ For the references in this paragraph see Marc Bloch 1978, pp. 142–146. In medieval sources the sign also appears on the back or between the shoulder-blades of non-royal figures. In such cases, however, it appears posthumously and as a sign that the soul of the person in question is saved. This is the interpretation of Fulcher of Chartres regarding crusaders who drowned on the way to the Holy Land in 1097. Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*. Recueil des Historiens des Croisades.

usually found on the right shoulder of the person in question or, alternatively, between the shoulder-blades. According to one troubadour, Charles of Anjou is said to have born the cross on his body. Likewise, around the year 1260 a contemporary chronicler notes that people saw the cross between the shoulders of Frederick II's grandson and namesake. At the end of the fifteenth century the leading members of the Habsburg family all allegedly had this mark on their backs. The sign is usually associated with reigning kings or pretenders to the throne who were cut off from their rightful inheritance at birth but were nevertheless destined to regain it in the future. In the later Middle Ages the sign, or a birthmark in the shape of a golden cross between the shoulders, became associated with the return of the so-called Emperor of the Last Days.¹²⁸ I would argue that Eysteinn's request, as reported in *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, represents a defiant statement about his right to rule as king.

The martyr-like aspect of the scene is underlined by the physical stance that Eysteinn assumes before Símun's retainer wields the axe: "[he] laid himself down on the face on the grass [and] stretched out his hands on each side". Eysteinn thus confronts his executioner with his body shaped in the sign of the cross. The Norwegian king was not the first to have (reportedly) made this gesture of *imitatio Christi* for it has been associated with martyrs from the earliest centuries of Christianity. For instance, the apologist Eusebius of Caesarea, writing in the beginning of the fourth century, tells in his *Ecclesiastical History* of a certain youth who was caught up in the persecution of Christians in Palestine in the second half of the third century. He was

... not twenty years of age, standing unbound and stretching his hands in the form of a Cross. ... while bears and leopards almost touched

Historiens Occidentaux, tome III (Paris, 1865), I, viii, p. 330. Note, however, the more sceptical attitude of Guibert of Nogent towards the appearance of the marks on the crusaders' bodies. Guibert of Nogent, *Gesta Dei per Francos*. Recueil des Historiens des Croisades. Historiens Occidentaux, tome IV (Paris, 1869), VII, xxxii, p. 251. See further on this aspect Purkis 2005. *Njáls saga* of the late thirteenth-century tells that Skarphéðinn Njálsson had two crosses etched into his torso, between his shoulder-blades and on his breast, after the burning of Bergþórshváll. Like Guibert of Nogent the saga author wants to make us believe that Skarphéðinn was himself responsible for imprinting them on his body. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslensk fornrit 12 (Reykjavík, 1954), pp. 342–344.

¹²⁸ Cohn 1953, p. 143.

his flesh. And yet their mouths were restrained, I know not how, by a divine and incomprehensible power.¹²⁹

According to *Tabula Othiniensis*, King Knud IV fell before the altar with his hands outstretched in the shape of a cross before he was killed.¹³⁰ As reportedly did Earl Waltheof of Northumbria who was executed in 1076 on the orders of William the Conqueror (and subsequently venerated as a saint). *Fagrskinna* tells that before his execution Waltheof gave his silver-tunic to his executioner and then spread himself on the ground in the shape of a cross. The saga states that the informant for this scene was a certain Iclander, Þorkell Þórðarson, a member of the earl's retinue.¹³¹ Although Ordericus Vitalis' description of Waltheof's execution differs in many important details from the Icelandic account, it is noteworthy that the earl is said to have "stretched out his arms" at the moment he faced the sword.¹³² Considering these two independent accounts of Waltheof's behaviour one is inclined to conclude that there was a strong tradition that the earl did strike this particular pose at his hour of death. It is also worth observing that in the near-contemporary *Sturlunga saga* we are told about three thirteenth-century Icelanders who made an identical gesture before their execution.¹³³

¹²⁹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vol. II. Loeb Classics, tr. by J. E. L. Oulton (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1932), 8. 7. 4, p. 273.

¹³⁰ "ante aram manibus solo tenus expansis in modum crucis latere lanceatus". *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 61.

¹³¹ *Ágrip*, pp. 294–295.

¹³² "Illis autem permittentibus surrexit et flexis tantum genibus oculisque in cælum fixis et manibus tensis". *The Ecclesiastical History of Ordericus Vitalis*, vol. II, Books III IV, ed. and tr. with introd. and notes by Marjorie Chibnall. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1969), p. 323.

¹³³ *Sturlunga saga* vol. I, pp. 256, 265. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 339–340. For these and other examples from Old Norse literature see Fritzner 1886 vol. II, pp. 351–353. There is an obvious penitential side to this form of *imitatio Christi*. A note, for instance, can be made of the curious behaviour of Henry III of Germany at the funeral of his mother in 1043 where the emperor, according to a letter written by Abbot Bern of Reichenau, threw off his purple and assumed the mourning habit of a penitent. In the presence of all the people Henry sank to the ground with his hands stretched out in the shape of a cross. On another occasion, before a battle against, the emperor set aside his mantle and regalia, dressed in penitential clothing and prostrated himself and assumed the cross-like shape. For a discussion of these two scenes see Schnith 1962, pp. 37–39. For the ritual humiliation of royal figures in general, see Koziol 1992. This act of humiliation must be seen within the context of christological perceptions of the medieval ruler, most tellingly displayed in Ottonian iconography where attributes of the suffering Christ are frequently associated with the office of emperor. Deshman 1976, pp. 367–406, esp. pp. 381–390.

There is naturally no way of verifying whether the execution of Eysteinn is accurately reported in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*. In one sense this is immaterial, for we are not dealing here with a description derived from a work of hagiography. Rather I would suggest that the passage in *Fagrskinna* and (and *Heimskringla*) reflects an oral tradition in which the ideas revolving around kingship, heroic attitude, and Christian martyrdom come together at King Eysteinn's hour of death. As such the scene demonstrates a high level of awareness regarding the appropriate conduct of a secular person whose death was seen by some as martyrdom.

Thus there appears to have been an oral tradition relating to the deaths of Eysteinn and Þorleifr. *Sverris saga*, at least, gives some support for this hypothesis regarding the latter figure. As in the case of Haraldr ungi we are told that a light (p. 158, from candles in the Norwegian case) was seen above the grave of Þorleifr breiðskeggr (a common hagiographic motif). In addition the saga tells that in order to prove that he was the son of Eysteinn, and thus of royal stock, Þorleifr drew attention to a scar, shaped in the form of a cross, located between his shoulder-blades. It is not immediately apparent in what manner the cross should prove anything about Þorleifr's royal parentage. The author of *Sverris saga* for one did not feel any need to comment on this problem. Clearly we encounter here another manifestation of the belief that a cross-shaped sign between the shoulder-blades represented a proof of royal pedigree. The tradition was not confined to historical figures for it also appears in popular medieval tales and later folklore.¹³⁴ To note but one example, in the late medieval romance of *Valentin und Namenlos* of which a Swedish version exists,¹³⁵ Phila, the sister of the king of France who is newly married to the king of Hungary, gives birth to twin sons. However, at their birth they are exposed by a wicked bishop and the king's

A similar link is made between the secular ruler and the *passio* of Christ in the *Ordo* for the coronation of Roger II on Christmas day 1130 where the prospective king is required to throw himself before the altar in the shape of a cross. Reinhard 1990, p. 171. This coronation-posture ultimately derives from the Ottonian court. Bornscheuer 1968, pp. 194–197.

¹³⁴ See the examples given in Dickson 1929, p. 49. In the standard motif-index of folkliterature and folklore the "cross between the shoulder blade as a proof of royal sanctity" is classified as H 71.5. Thompson (ed.) 1965, p. 380.

¹³⁵ *Namnlös och Valentin, en medeltidsroman. (Namenlos und Valentin)*, ed. by G. E. Klemming. Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet, samlingar, del III, häft 1 (Stockholm, 1846).

mother who both fear that the twins will be a threat to their own authority when they come of age. The infants survive and one, Valentin, is found in a box floating on the river and rescued by Clarina, Phila's sister, who instantly recognises that the child is of noble descent by the cross it has between its shoulders.¹³⁶ The years go by and finally Valentin meets his twin brother Namenlos and observes that both have identical marks on their body, a scar in the shape of the cross between the shoulder-blades.¹³⁷ This discovery convinces them that they are closely related and together they set out to find their royal parents which, of course, they eventually succeed in doing after various colourful adventures.

Þorleifr breiðskeggr was not a hero in a medieval romance and his life did certainly not have a fairy-tale ending. Nevertheless the similarities between his case and that of Valentin and Namenlos are obvious. In both scenarios a scar in the shape of a cross between the shoulder-blades is upheld as evidence of royal descent. On the other hand, in the case of the Norwegian pretender, this corporeal mark taps into an oral tradition relating to the death of his alleged father, King Eysteinn Haraldsson who, as noted, is said to have requested at his execution that the sign should be slashed between his shoulder-blades. By divine design the death-mark of the father becomes the birth-mark of his son. Here, I suggest, we get a decidedly rare glimpse of a kind of "oral hagiography" which could sustain and enhance the saintly reputation of killed secular leaders in the absence of official promotion of their cults.

4.6. *Violent Death and Sanctity*

In addition to the canonized princely martyrs, a number of secular leaders were associated with sanctity in the twelfth-century Scandinavian lands. At one end of the spectrum we have Ólafr Tryggvason, who was deemed worthy of saintly status by Icelandic and Norwegian men of letters as a result of his missionary efforts, and Erik emune who, as a patron of the Church, was held in particular esteem by the clergy of Lund Cathedral. At the other end we have figures such

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 261–64.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 1208–1210.

as King Eysteinn Haraldsson, King Knud Magnusson, and Earl Haraldr ungi whose saintly reputations cannot be separated from the dynastic politics of Norway, Denmark and Orkney. In spite of the scarcity of sources relating to these cases a common pattern can still be noted. King Knud Magnusson, Earl Haraldr ungi, King Haraldr gilli, King Eysteinn Haraldsson and Þorleifr breiðskeggr were all members, or claimed to be members, of particular branches of the ruling dynasties in their respective lands. Like the canonized princely saints, they were murdered or killed by political rivals. But in contrast to the official martyrs the descendants or kinsmen of these leaders did not assume power (with the exception of King Haraldr gilli) and secure the future of the cults of their relatives.

It is reasonable to assume that the sources at our disposal do not tell about all the secular leaders associated with sanctity in this period. For instance *Sverris saga*, the main source for Norwegian political history in the fourth quarter of the twelfth-century, is a partisan account that was written, at least partly, under the guidance of King Sverrir himself. Thus we only hear of Þorleifr's saintly reputation because the author of the work considered it necessary to refute that reputation and belittle those who upheld it. Still, if we look only at the twelfth century (and exclude Ólafr Tryggvason, Erik emune and Sigurðr slembir) no less than six rulers or pretenders were associated with sanctity in the Scandinavian dominions without, however, their cults ever being officially recognised. Of these two were killed in battle (Earl Haraldr ungi and Þorleifr breiðskeggr) three were murdered or executed, (Kings Knud Magnusson, Haraldr gilli and Eysteinn Haraldsson) and one who died of natural causes (Ólafr ógæfa). From this list and the examples of the official cults—St Magnús, St Knud Lavard, St Erik and St Rögnvaldr—it becomes apparent that in the twelfth century sanctity of secular leaders was intimately linked with violent death.

It is nevertheless important to re-emphasise that the interplay of factors, which may contribute to the appearance of this phenomenon, has only left behind them the faintest of traces in the sources. As a result we are confronted with some awkward questions. For instance, why is there no suggestion in the sources that Magnús Erlingsson was considered a saintly figure? After all the popular Magnús, the Lord's anointed, had died a violent death in 1184 at the battle of Fimreiti and his cause had been supported by an archbishop who had not hesitated to utilize his religious authority in the

power-struggle of the time. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, in 1196 the struggle against King Sverrir was resumed by the so-called *Baglar* ('croziers'), a faction which in the beginning held up claim to kingship of Ingi, King Magnús' (alleged) son. And the leader of this faction was the bishop of Oslo, Nikulás Árnason (1188–1225), whose efforts were supported by the archbishop of Nidaros.¹³⁸

As Peter Foote has observed, the unstable political situation in Norway from c. 1130 onwards (and in Iceland in the first half of the thirteenth century) provided a fertile ground for religious sentiments to enter secular disputes and civil strife.¹³⁹ The same observation is also applicable to Orkney and Denmark. Political factions and princely pretenders identified their own cause with divine will and, conversely, associated that of their enemies with the devil and his sphere of influence.¹⁴⁰ A clear expression of such a sentiment appears, for example, in Valdemar I's privileges to the monastery at Ringsted where he attributes his victory in 1157 over King Sven to the fact that God had been on his side.¹⁴¹ In a turbulent age violent death was equated with martyrdom which in turn hallowed a particular political cause. In this respect the willingness of ecclesiastics to present the death of secular rulers in terms of martyrdom was surely an important factor. If King Ólafr Haraldsson, King Knud of Odense and Earl Magnús—all killed within the context of political struggle—were martyrs then there was no reason why the same honour could not be bestowed on King Haraldr gilli, Earl Haraldr ungi of Orkney and the pretender Þorleifr breiðskeggr. As we have seen ecclesiastics had, for varying reasons, promulgated the notion that, in exceptional circumstances, secular figures could attain sanctity through martyrdom within Christian society. In the hagiographic literature the saintly status of the princely martyrs is partly justified by the support they show for Christianity and their righteous conduct in office. As regards the unofficial political cults, on the other hand, no such justification was needed. Violent death was a sufficient reason for a fallen leader to be linked with sanctity. What we are confronted with is the adoption of the idea of Christian martyrdom

¹³⁸ On Nikulás see Bagge 2002.

¹³⁹ Foote 1984, especially pp. 32–34.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–47.

¹⁴¹ See footnote 135 on page 136.

by the laity; the Scandinavian people embraced (so to speak) martyrdom in this period to the extent that it effectively became the only criterion for indigenous sainthood. Indeed, it is a fact seldom appreciated that before the fourth quarter of the twelfth century the Church in Scandinavia did not, apparently, make an effort to have cults of native confessors officially recognised.¹⁴² The argument can be put forward that Scandinavians were particularly susceptible to the notion of martyrdom because it accorded well with their ideas about heroic stance in the face of certain death.¹⁴³ The description of Eysteinn's execution discussed above and the elevation of King Knud's retainers to sainthood by the clergy of Odense are cases in point (see ch. 3.3). Moreover, considering that the earliest Christian literature translated in Scandinavia were Lives of the early saints, many of them martyrs, one can perhaps begin to envisage how this merger of the saintly and the heroic came about.¹⁴⁴

There are still more fundamental reasons why martyrdom of secular figures became the dominant recognised form of sanctity in the Nordic lands in our period. In earlier chapters it was argued that the promotion of princely cults was one way for the Church (or ecclesiastical communities) to negotiate its position in a relatively recently converted society. There can be little doubt that men of the Church would have preferred to bestow sanctity on abbots and bishops rather than secular war-lords. In the eleventh century and for most of the twelfth century they did not, however, go down this route. The reason for this is simple: a successful promotion of a confessor-cult required a level of ecclesiastical development, which simply had not been attained in this period. Only when the Church had divorced itself sufficiently "from its subordination under the monarchy and its heavy dependence on peasant society [and] become more firmly incorporated into the universal church under papal lead-

¹⁴² There were, however, some local cults of foreign missionaries. On the cult of the German St Theodgarus in the late eleventh- and early twelfth century, see *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 3–4. See also footnote no. 28 on pp. 75–76. On such cults in Sweden see Schmid 1931, pp. 102–114. Toy 2003.

¹⁴³ See for instance Cormack 1994 B, pp. 187–219. A fusion of this sort was of course not confined to the Scandinavian sphere. See Farnham 1964, pp. 143–164, esp. pp. 162–164. Cross 1965, pp. 93–109, esp. pp. 100–101.

¹⁴⁴ Sub. 'Saints Lives'. This hypothesis is discussed by Mundal 1995/96, pp. 105–109.

ership”¹⁴⁵ could it begin to promote the sanctity of members from its own ranks. In the last quarter of the twelfth century we see a shift in that direction in both Denmark and Norway. Thus in 1187 Archbishop Absalon of Lund attempted to have the papacy recognise the saintly status of St Ketil of Viborg (d. 1150),¹⁴⁶ and following the episcopal translation of Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson in 1229 the Norwegian Church began a lengthy, albeit unsuccessful, campaign to secure papal approval for his sanctity.¹⁴⁷

The notion has become a scholarly commonplace that the “Age of the Martyrs” came to a close when the Roman Empire ended its persecution of Christians and the supply of martyrs effectively dried up. This, of course, is true but it only tells a part of the story. The rise of the confessor saint had equally to do, if not more so, with the fact that the Church had become sufficiently entrenched to be able to regulate the lives of ordinary Christians in a manner unknown in earlier times.¹⁴⁸ In this respect the image of the confessor saint reflected the growing confidence and power of the Church. The “New Saint” incorporated in his persona all the virtues that the Church held in high regard: authority and discipline. The idea of martyrdom, however, can be likened to an empty vessel that the laity could fill with whichever brew suited in any given circumstances. As such it potentially lay outside the Church’s control and seen from this perspective the story of St Martin’s dealings with the rural martyr-cult is a highly symbolic one. The archetypal confessor eradicates a local cult that perverts the idea of martyrdom beyond all recognition (see p. 194). A similar pattern is applicable to the Scandinavian lands in the twelfth century. The phenomenon of martyrdom could exist in the absence of ecclesiastical involvement; the only criterion was the perception by the laity that a secular person who had come to a violent end deserved the crown of sanctity. It was precisely the lack of clear boundaries of definition which made martyrdom so

¹⁴⁵ Sawyer 1988, p. 53. Sawyer is referring here to the establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53. It could, of course, be argued that the Church in Denmark was more advanced than in either Norway and Sweden.

¹⁴⁶ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 251–252.

¹⁴⁷ For the exchange of letters between the archbishopric and the papacy see, *Regesta Norvegica* I, no. 712, 713, 759, 760, 845, 920, 921. *Regesta Norvegica* II: 1264–1300, ed. by Narve Bjørge (Oslo, 1978), pp. 71–73.

¹⁴⁸ See, for instance, Vauchez 1997, pp. 13–16.

easily applicable in the politically turbulent period under discussion. Men of the Church in turn neither had the capability, nor perhaps the will, to counter these un-official cults. Indeed one should not rule out the possibility that ecclesiastics were on occasions involved (in the cult of Earl Haraldr ungi, for instance).

In the later Middle Ages the Church was able to adopt a more determined stand against un-official cults of this kind. A case in point is the cult of the so-called “false Margarét” in Norway. Around the year 1300 a woman of German extraction appeared on the scene in Bergen and claimed to be Margarét (better known as the “Maid of Norway”), the daughter of King Eiríkr Magnússon who in 1290 had drowned on her way to Scotland. As a punishment for pretending to be of royal blood the woman was executed in 1301. Afterwards some people upheld the view that she had indeed been the real Margarét and began to venerate her as a martyr. Nordness, where she had been burnt at the stake, became the centre of a cult and a place of pilgrimage. Auðfinnr, the bishop of Bergen, reacted to this development and in an open letter of 1320 he forbade the veneration of the “false Margarét”.¹⁴⁹ Although Auðfinnr’s efforts to eradicate the cult were not entirely successful,¹⁵⁰ his initiative still demonstrates that by this point in time the Church was prepared to clamp down on popular cults of this kind.¹⁵¹

In the twelfth century, however, the laity could apparently freely adopt the idea of martyrdom to the political circumstances of the time; its interpretation was to an extent out of the hands of ecclesiastics although, on occasion, they could exploit it to their advantage.¹⁵² An illustrative, albeit somewhat anecdotal, example of this appears in a speech which King Sverrir Sigurðarson delivered in 1179 at the funeral of his long-standing enemy, Earl Erlingr skakki, whom he had defeated and killed in battle:

Hér eru nú mörg tíðendi at sjá ok vita, þau er mikils eru verð ok mönnum megu vera þakksamlig, at bæði til þessarar kirkju ok annarra

¹⁴⁹ *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, vol. VIII, ed. by C. R. Unger and H. J. Huitfeldt (Christiania, 1874), no. 67, pp. 88–89. Further on the cult, and its possible political dimension, see Munch 1859, pp. 346–352. How to deal with the cult of “false Margarét” entwined with the dispute between the cathedral chapter and bishop of Bergen. See Bagge 1976, pp. 124–126.

¹⁵⁰ Lidén and Magerøy 1980, pp. 147–149.

¹⁵¹ Of course the fact that the false “Margarét” was a royal imposter also made the eradication of her cult an imperative.

¹⁵² What follows is more thoroughly treated in Haki Antonsson, 2004 B.

eru bornir margir líkamir fleira manna, er fylgt hafa Magnúsi konungi. En þat er sem mörgum mun kunnigt vera, at Eysteinn erkibyskup ok margir aðrir lærðir menn hafa jafnan sagt, at allir þeir menn, er berðist með Magnúsi konungi ok verði land hans ok létist með því, at sálur þeira manna allra væri fyrr í Paradíso en blóðit væri kalt á jörðunni. Nú megum vér allir fagna hér svá margra manna heilagleik, sem hér munu helgir hafa orðit, ef þetta er svá sem erkibiskup hefir sagt, at allir sé þeir orðnir helgir menn, er fallit hafa með Erlingi jarli.¹⁵³

Much to be seen and known is taking place here now, of great importance and a cause of thankfulness to men, in that both here and to other churches are carried the bodies of many who followed King Magnús. For, indeed, it is known to many that Archbishop Eystein and many other learned men have constantly said concerning all who die fighting for King Magnús and defending his land, that their souls will enter Paradise before their blood is cold on the ground. We may here rejoice at the saintliness of many men who have become saints, if it is correct what the archbishop has said, that everyone who died fighting under Earl Erling have become saints.¹⁵⁴

Taking Sverrir's words at their face value, Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson promised a place in paradise to those who died on the "right side" in the civil war. Indeed there are indications that Eysteinn, and those ecclesiastics who supported King Magnús Erlingsson, did promise heavenly rewards to those who fought against Sverrir and the Birkibeinar. Canon no. 2 of the so-called *Canones Nidrosiensis*, composed sometime in the 1160s or 1170s for the Norwegian archbishopric,¹⁵⁵ includes the following clause:

Volumus autem ut episcopi, abbates et reliqui sacerdotes per singulas ciuitates, burgos et uillas populum sibi commissum modis omnibus exhortentur quatenus contra excommunicatos et turbatores pacis uiriliter studeant dimicare, eos pariter componentes quod si pro

¹⁵³ For convenience sake I cite this passage from *Konunga sögur II. Sverris saga eftir Karl ábóta*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1967), pp. 74–75.

¹⁵⁴ My own translation.

¹⁵⁵ The exact date of the composition of the *Canones Nidrosiensis* has been a matter of some scholarly debate. The most commonly accepted view is that it was put together on the occasion of Magnús Erlingsson's coronation in 1162/63. Other scholars, most notably Vegard Skánland in his doctoral thesis, have argued for the 1170s as a more likely date for its composition. Skánland 1969. A recent attempt, not a convincing one in my estimation, has been made to date *Canones Nidrosiensis* to the 1180s, that is to the reign of Sverrir. Sandaaker 1988, pp. 20–25. There is, however, a general consensus that the document was composed by Archbishop Eysteinn himself or at least under his close guidance.

defensione pacis et saluatione patriae fideliter morientur, regna celestia, consequuntur.¹⁵⁶

We wish, however, that the bishops, the abbots, and the other priests in every city, town, and village should exhort by every means the people entrusted to them, that they strive to fight manfully against excommunicates and disturbers of the peace, reminding them at the same time that if they should die faithfully for the defence of peace and the safety of the fatherland, they shall attain the heavenly kingdom.¹⁵⁷

It has long been recognised that *Canones Nidrosiensis* is heavily influenced by Gratian's *Decretum*, completed around 1140. The *Decretum* is essentially a textbook of canon law which contains a collection of patristic text, conciliar decrees and papal pronouncements relating to all fields of Church discipline. Moreover, it has been established that the passage in question looked back to Leo IV's letter of 853 in which the pope expressed the hope that those who died while fighting the enemies of the faith would achieve eternal salvation.¹⁵⁸ Reminding the Franks of their earlier victories against the same enemy, the pope held out the promise that those who died in the struggle would find reward in heaven. The background to this utterance was the threat posed to the papal lands and the city of Rome itself by the Saracens. The passage in the *Canones Nidrosiensis* clearly represents an adaptation of this papal utterance, which Gratian had incorporated into his decretal. But instead of referring to the enemies of the faith, that is non-Christians, the Norwegian canon refers to excommunicates and disturbers of the peace. In other words, those who die defending the *patria* against the rebellious elements will achieve everlasting glory in heaven. Interestingly, within the larger European context the most significant aspect of this passage is that it constitutes one of the earliest appearances of the notion that dying in warfare against fellow Christians merited eternal life.¹⁵⁹

As has been pointed out, Leo IV's words should not be confused with any sort of papal indulgence, that is pontifical power to remit temporal punishment owed for sins in return for fighting on behalf of Christendom (or the papacy).¹⁶⁰ Rather the pope's statement should

¹⁵⁶ I refer to the edition in Skånland 1969, p. 189.

¹⁵⁷ My own translation.

¹⁵⁸ Skånland 1969, pp. 98–102.

¹⁵⁹ Housley 1985, pp. 24–25.

¹⁶⁰ Brundage 1969, p. 33.

be read as an expression of pious hope and belief that those who died in his cause would (by the grace of God) achieve eternal life. Still, with this statement of 853 the papacy had made for the first time a connection between fighting in defence of the faith and the prospect of eternal salvation. The passage in the *Canones Nidrosiensis*, on the other hand, has behind it the authority of ecclesiastical law, applicable within the boundaries of the archbishopric of Nidaros. It should be noted that it does not convey hope or expectation that those who die in defence of the *patria* will achieve eternal life, but rather a certainty that this will be the case.

In this respect the passage is out of step with papal policy in the later twelfth century. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the idea had developed apace that dying in battle against the enemies of Christianity merited spiritual rewards. This development came about almost exclusively as a result of the Papacy's involvement in the Spanish *reconquista* from the 1070s onwards and, of course, the crusades launched by the papacy from 1095 onwards. In 1063 Pope Alexander II relieved the Christian warriors, fighting against the Moors in Spain, from the penance required for their sins. Thus the concept that those who died fighting on behalf of Christendom would be rewarded with some spiritual rewards was already in place at the eve of the First Crusade.¹⁶¹ But it should be emphasised that the papacy at no point declared that those who made the ultimate sacrifice would automatically gain everlasting life in heaven. The reason for this was that no earthly power, not even the papacy, knew the exact extent of the penance needed to enter heaven. This knowledge was preserved for God alone. The passage in the *Canones Nidrosiensis* thus harked back to a time prior to the second half of the eleventh century when the papacy began linking the idea of commuting penance owed for sins with fighting the enemies of Christianity.

Thus the passage stands out for two reasons. Firstly, it substitutes fighting against non-Christians, i.e. Muslims, with fighting against Christian enemies of the *patria*, the earthly fatherland, rather than Christendom or the Papacy. Secondly, the Canon bypasses the whole association of Just War with the Church's authority in matter of

¹⁶¹ Brundage 1976, pp. 104–105. Erdmann 1935, pp. 124–126. Riley-Smith 1984, pp. 14–31. Morris 1993, pp. 93–105.

penance. Certainly it represents, as alluded to, an early instance of a regional authority issuing such a promise. Of course such promises became regular in the thirteenth and fourteenth century when the papacy frequently issued crusading indulgences, particularly to those who fought heresy within Christendom or indeed the pope's enemies.

Interestingly, the archbishopric of Nidaros was not the only regional Church authority in the third quarter of the twelfth century that connected the defence of the fatherland with spiritual rewards. In 1166 the Synod of Segovia in the Spanish Kingdom of Castile, headed by the bishop of Toledo, decreed that any subject that fought against the threat posed to Castile by external enemies, at that point the Kingdom of Leon, would enjoy remittance of their sins like those promised to pilgrims to Jerusalem.¹⁶² In matter of fact the setting for the Synod of Segovia in 1166 bears a notable resemblance to the political context that probably shaped the *Canones Nidrosiensis*. When the Synod of Segovia took place the new king of Castile, Alfonso VIII was only two years old. Previous kings of Castile had granted the archbishopric of Toledo considerable rights and privileges that the synod was keen to defend against any potential threats, whether internal or external. Hence the equation of spiritual reward for anyone who fought in defence of the anointed infant king. Similarly, as we have seen, during the early years of King Magnús Erlingsson's reign, who was only eight years old when crowned, the cause of Church and Crown was hallowed by divine blessing and protection against potential enemies (whether Norwegian pretenders or Danish kings).

But there is a notable difference between the promises made by the Synod of Segovia and the Canon no. 2 in the *Canones Nidrosiensis*. The Castilian synod only stipulated that those who battled for Alfonso VIII would be rewarded with the same spiritual benefits as those who undertook pilgrimage to Jerusalem, presumably the remission of all temporal punishments owed for confessed sins. In this respect the Synod of Segovia was adapting an idea that had developed in relation to the Crusades in the East and, indeed, the reconquest of

¹⁶² Linehan 1980, pp. 31–44. On the ideas of martyrdom, penance and patriotism in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Castile, see Guance 1998.

the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims. The *Canones Nidrosiensis*, on the other hand, went much further: it unequivocally promised eternal salvation to those who fought *pro patria*.

Why did the archbishopric of Nidaros, with Archbishop Eysteinn at its helm, bypass the options that the penitential system had to offer in relation to Just Warfare and spiritual rewards? This was certainly not due to Eysteinn's ignorance on the subject. The most likely answer to this question is that Eysteinn was tapping into a prevailing preoccupation with the idea of attaining holiness through violent death. For this purpose he utilized a theologically ambiguous, and arguably defunct, decree that, crucially, had been included in the prestigious Gratian's decretal. But of course Canon no. 2 does not promise sanctity for those who die in defence of the fatherland and King Magnús Erlingsson. It only states that those who suffer this fate will attain eternal salvation. From the Church's perspective the difference was vast between eternal salvation, however achieved, and martyrdom. One simply signifies an entry into heaven while the other denotes a place at God's right hand. By their very nature, however, it is not difficult to envisage how the boundaries of the idea of achieving salvation through dying for Christendom or the fatherland on one hand and martyrdom on the other hand could become blurred. This is precisely what took place in the wake of the First Crusade. As mentioned the papacy did not promise martyrdom to those who died fighting Muslims in the East but a clear link was quickly made between going on a crusade, not to speak of dying as a result, and spiritual rewards. The chroniclers of the Crusades, however, had little time for such theological niceties and without hesitation ascribed martyrdom to those who died in combat or even through disease.¹⁶³

From Sverrir's speech in *Sverris saga* we can deduce that Archbishop Eysteinn and the ecclesiastics under his authority applied the decree in Canon no. 2 during the conflict against Sverrir and his followers. The question remains, however, whether Eysteinn and his men preached that not only paradise but also sanctity would follow death on the battlefield. Or is this a case of Sverrir misinterpreting for rhetorical purposes the words of his enemies and thus conflating the

¹⁶³ Cowdrey 1985, pp. 46–56.

promise of paradise with sanctity? The third option is probably nearer the mark, i.e. that in the course of the Civil War this conflation had taken place among the foot-soldiers of Magnús Erlingsson. Thus in late twelfth-century Norway we see the popular notion of martyrdom, or at least glorious death, harnessed in the name of domestic warfare.

PART FIVE

THE POPULAR CONTEXT

5.1. *The “Pagan Hypothesis”*

In recent decades scholars have primarily concentrated on the political dimension to the royal saints' cults, more specifically their promotion by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities. This is the approach adopted, for instance, by Susan Ridyard, Alan Thacker and David Rollason in relation to the Anglo-Saxon cults, and by Carsten Breengaard, Erich Hoffmann and Tore Nyberg regarding the Scandinavian scene.¹ From a variety of perspectives these scholars have highlighted the diverse roles of such cults in medieval society. Particular emphasis has been placed on the manner in which princely cults were promoted in order to bestow divine sanction on dynasties or separate branches of ruling houses. It has also been pointed out that the cults had the potential to enhance both the secular and the ecclesiastical power in relatively newly christianized lands.² Finally it has been stressed that the literature on the royal saints was an ideal platform for ecclesiastics to promote “not just a model but a yardstick of kingly conduct and performance in office”.³

If secular and ecclesiastical patronage was of pivotal importance in the establishment of the princely cults, the third factor, the role of the general population, is difficult to leave out of the equation. This aspect, however, constitutes a problem of considerable magnitude for although the sources may allow the historian to reconstruct, however inadequately, the involvement of *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in the establishment of such cults, they are at best vague when it comes to the participation of the population at large in the same process.

¹ Ridyard 1988. Thacker 1985, pp. 1–25. Rollason 1986, pp. 91–103. *Idem* 1983. Breengaard 1982. Hoffmann 1975. Nyberg 1992.

² Graus 1968, pp. 425–432. And a slightly different version, *ibid.*, 1969, pp. 370–377.

³ Nelson 1973, pp. 43–44.

Not surprisingly therefore some scholars have tended to downplay the importance of this dimension or even ignore it altogether.⁴

Miracle accounts aside, on occasion the participation of ordinary people in the emergence of the princely cults is noted in the Scandinavian sources. Thus we are told that the people of Orkney spoke amongst themselves that Earl Magnús was a saint, while according to Snorri the Trønder were the first to believe in King Ólafr's sanctity. Similarly, the clergy of Odense are said to have elevated the relics of the Danish king in response to a popular belief in the sanctity of Knud IV. Naturally, claims of this sort must be approached with a degree of caution for hagiographers were undoubtedly conscious that a cult needed to incorporate a popular dimension from the beginning.⁵ Still, it is noteworthy that in the case of the most blatantly "manufactured" dynastic cult, that of St Knud Lavard, the enthusiasm of ordinary people is conspicuous by its absence.

In the Middle Ages veneration of princely martyrs represents only one facet of the immensely popular phenomenon of martyrdom. As André Vauchez has pointed out the model of the holy sufferer, "remained the archetype of sainthood in the popular mind".⁶ From the first centuries of Christianity the simple fact that someone met a violent end provided a seed from which a potential martyr-cult could grow. An illustrative case of this appears in Sulpicius Severus' Life of St Martin of Tours, which he composed at the end of the fourth century. It tells that during one of the saint's frequent pastoral excursions into the countryside, he came across people who considered a certain location holy because there a martyr had laid down his life. Inquiring into the case, St Martin discovered that the

⁴ For instance, speaking of the Mercian princely cults, Alan Thacker confidently states that there "is no evidence that they stemmed from a royal or clerical response to popular devotion". Thacker 1985, p. 20. See, however, Catherine Cubitt's argument for the popular origins of some of the Anglo-Saxon princely cults, Cubitt 2000.

⁵ "The hagiographic texts depict the typical medieval story of a "popular" cult emerging from the grass roots. In this model the saint's body lies unknown and neglected; it is safeguarded by God until it is found, having been revealed by miraculous signs; it is then buried with appropriate honors and, suitably enshrined, attracts the veneration of believers; miracles happen to "people", who then report them to the authorities; initially disbelieving they are awe-struck, but ultimately praise God and officially recognise the saint's holiness and standing with God. Of course, events may indeed have unfolded in just this way, but even if we are skeptical, there is no way of getting "behind" the sources". The Hagiography of Kievan Rus', p. xxviii. On the "reluctant bishop" *topos* see footnote no. 28 on pp. 75–76.

⁶ Vauchez 1997, pp. 172–173.

object of the veneration was a brigand who had been executed for his crimes. As was Martin's wont he delivered the people from their error.⁷ About eight centuries later an Icelander vividly expressed the notion that any Christian could atone for his sins by suffering a violent and undeserved death. The thirteenth-century *Sólarljóð* ("Sun-Poem") tells of a man with an evil past who invites a traveller into his house and supplies him with board and lodging. The guest, however, betrays the trust shown to him and murders his host. On account of his ill deserved death the host is forgiven his past misdemeanours and angels escort him to heaven.⁸ This miniature *exemplum* illustrates succinctly the manner in which violent death within a Christian setting could be associated with rewards in the after-life.

In this context the sense of communal guilt over the death of an innocent individual is also a noteworthy feature. According to the thirteenth-century Dominican friar Stephan of Bourbon, a cult had sprung up in the diocese of Lyons around a dog that had saved a child from a serpent but was subsequently killed as a result of a misunderstanding.⁹ In twelfth- and thirteenth-century England some ecclesiastical institutions promoted martyr-cults of young boys, usually of humble background, whose violent deaths were blamed on the resident Jews. These cults not only tapped into anti-semitic attitudes but also the dormant appetite of the English, which stretched back into the Anglo-Saxon period, for child-martyrs.¹⁰ In Scandinavia a comparable non-princely martyr-cult appeared in the Danish town of Roskilde. A certain Margrete (or Margarét) (d. 1176) was venerated when it was discovered that her husband had killed her and made it appear as though she had committed suicide.¹¹ A rare glimpse of how betrayal and killing of an innocent merited a public display of revulsion illustrated by a eleventh-century runic inscription from Bornholm: "Ásvaldi set up this stone in memory of Alfarr, his brother. A noble *drengr* killed shamefully, and Skógi betrayed him

⁷ Sulpicius Severus, *Vie de saint Martin*, vol. I, ed. by J. Fontaine (Paris, 1968), iv, 3, p. 277.

⁸ *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A 1, pp. 628–629.

⁹ See the study of the cult by Schmitt 1983. See also the illuminating discussion by Rubin 1993, pp. 162–164.

¹⁰ Stacey 2000, p. 169.

¹¹ *Scriptores minores historicae Danicae mediæ ævi*, vol. I–II, ed. by M. CL. Gertz (Copenhagen, 1917–1922), vol. II, p. 56. Gad 1966, pp. 351–352. Hill 1992, pp. 280–286.

innocent”.¹² Although there are no means to help us establish why violent death, and especially the killing of blameless victims, carried with it such a strong emotive appeal in medieval times, it is clear that there was a distinct tendency to equate such events with martyrdom and hence sanctity.

Not satisfied with observations based on the general appeal of martyrdom, some commentators have sought to explain the prominence of royal martyr-cults in Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England in terms of lingering pagan sentiments that were associated with Scandinavian/Germanic rulership.¹³ For instance, discussing the popular roots of St Magnús’ cult, W. P. L. Thomson maintains that the “king-saints of Scandinavia and the earl-saints of Orkney embody older, pre-Christian concepts of sacral kingship, when the king as descendant and successor of the gods exercised a supreme priestly function”.¹⁴ Thomson, moreover, sees a particular correspondence between the martyrdom of Earl Magnús and the Norse myth of Baldr’s death, the god who was killed by no fault of his own as a result of evil scheming. Here we encounter a variation of somewhat well-trodden Frazerian notions where Baldr incorporates the spirit of fertility and is subjected to a ritual sacrifice for the benefit of his subjects and dynastic successors.¹⁵ But in one sense the response of both gods and men to the killing of Baldr, as described in Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, does encapsulate well the sentiments associated with an innocent figure who comes to a violent and unjust end.¹⁶ One observes in passing that it was the same author who told how the people of Trøndelag were stricken with remorse over their part in the killing of St Ólafr.¹⁷

¹² For the references see Jesch 2001, p. 255. The translation is by Jesch.

¹³ For a more extensive historiographical survey and discussion of paganism and the princely saints’ cults, see Klaniczay 2002, pp. 7–11, 64–78.

¹⁴ Thomson 1987, p. 66. It is, however, only fair to add Thomson appears to have changed his mind on the issue: “It is hardly likely that a real memory of sacral kingship was preserved in twelfth-century Orkney . . .”. Thomson 2003, p. 59. The question whether the description of Baldr’s death itself was influenced by the passion of Christ is not addressed. See also the debatable observations in Brunsden 1997, pp. 134–136.

¹⁵ Martin 1972, pp. 111–116. Lindow 1997, pp. 30–31.

¹⁶ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford, 1982), p. 46.

¹⁷ *Heimskringla* II, pp. 402–403.

Thomson's premise for his interpretation of the emotive appeal of Magnús' cult—that pagan sentiments facilitated the emergence of the cult of a princely martyr—has a considerable historiographical background. The most influential study in this respect is undoubtedly Karl Hauck's article "Geblütsheiligkeit", published in 1950.¹⁸ Although the essence of Hauck's thesis may not have been wholly new at the time, he was the first to adopt a comparative approach in search for a link between pagan attitudes and the phenomenon of royal sanctity. Hauck, who included in his study cults of rulers from the early middle ages into the early modern period, proceeded from the assumption that Germanic kingship was inherently sacral; certain dynasties, on account of their social status, were seen as divine. Members of these dynasties were considered, and in turn considered themselves, to possess "king's luck" (*"Königsheil"*) which secured them and their followers victory in battle, fertility of their dominions and the general well-being of their subjects. With the coming of Christianity the sacral status of the king (or prince) did not undergo a fundamental transformation but was rather directed by the Church into more acceptable channels. The veneration of royal saints (and not exclusively martyrs) was thus, in essence, a Christian continuum of a pagan belief in the sacral nature of kingship.

In William Chaney's *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England* published in 1970 the core of Hauck's thesis was translated to the English scene. Chaney's primary objective was to demonstrate the profound influence that Germanic paganism had exerted on Anglo-Saxon kingship, even after Christianity had taken firm roots. Having adopted this stance, it is not surprising that he stressed the link, on the one hand, between the alleged sacral nature of the kings of the heathen era and, on the other hand, the cults of the princely martyrs which appeared in Anglo-Saxon England from the seventh century onwards.¹⁹ Chaney made much of the fact that surviving regnal lists of prominent Anglo-Saxon dynasties, most notably that of Mercia, Bernicia and East Anglia, trace their ancestry back to Wotan. Members of these dynasties were thus believed to be of divine nature which, in turn, argued Chaney, accounts for the prominence of royal cults in

¹⁸ Hauck 1950, pp. 187–240.

¹⁹ Chaney 1970. See Robert Brentano's critical observations on this work, Brentano 1972, pp. 754–755.

pre-Conquest England. In other words, the sanctity of the killed rulers had less to do with any Christian virtues they were seen to possess—fighting pagans, ascetic life-style or just rulership—and more to do with their blood line and social status. Cultic veneration of royal figures such as Oswald of Northumbria, Edmund of East Anglia and Edward the Martyr was a manifestation of pagan beliefs, which had survived the conversion to Christianity in a transmuted form.

Chaney's conclusions were elaborated on in Erich Hoffmann's *Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern*.²⁰ Hoffmann argued that the Anglo-Saxon and the Scandinavian people, still strongly attached to a pre-Christian world view, interpreted the slaying of their rulers—whether killed in battle, executed or assassinated—as sacrifices in the heathen style to Óðinn. The correspondence between this popular perception and the Christian concept of martyrdom, as promoted by men of the Church, resulted in syncretism which facilitated the emergence of the princely martyr cults. Hoffmann also pointed out that in pagan times royal dynasties had, apparently, legitimised their authority by claiming descent from the pagan gods. With the adoption of Christianity this link was severed, but in its place the saintly king was presented as “*Stammvater*”, the founding father, of the dynasty.²¹

Scholars that have adopted more conventional approaches to the study of royal sanctity have not been wholly untouched by the “pagan hypothesis”, or at least by certain aspects of it. Thus David Rollason in his *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* concedes that the proliferation of royal cults may reflect the “church's need to make allowance for the strength of English paganism in the period of the conversion and to assimilate some elements of that religion into English Christianity”.²² Possibly “the people venerated the royal saints as the pagan priest-kings had been venerated and, as many had died violently, a parallel was seen with the pagan kings sacrificed to

²⁰ Hoffmann 1975, pp. 46–58.

²¹ The search for pre-Christian influence on the emergence of princely cults has not been confined to the Germanic lands or the cult of Wotan/Óðinn. Ideas of similar nature have been promulgated in relation to St Wenceslas and St Stephen, the patron saints of Bohemia and Hungary respectively. See the studies referred to in Klaniczay 1993.

²² Rollason 1989, p. 126.

Gods".²³ Other students of royal sanctity have adopted a more sceptical stance towards the "pagan hypothesis". In particular, Frantisek Graus in his seminal *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich Merowinger* (1964) vehemently attacked the assumption that there was a link between the perceived sacrality of the Germanic kings and the emergence of royal sainthood in the Merovingian period.²⁴ In his view the saintly kings and queens were not venerated because of the inherent sacrality that they might have been perceived to possess but rather as a result of their virtuous (often monastic) lifestyle and patronage of the Church. Janet L. Nelson and Susan J. Ridyard have both made similar observations and argued that the "pagan hypothesis", in particular as presented by William Chaney, oversimplifies the problem for it does not take on board the profound changes in royal ideology which came in the wake of Christianity.²⁵ In the opinion of the latter the Church did far more than simply adopt the traditions of pre-Christian society in matters relating to the image of kingship: "Its concern was rather to mold the rulership which it inherited in accordance with its own societal needs—to create a new model of useful rulership".²⁶ Sanctity was not believed to flow in the blood of royal dynasties and kings were not automatically elevated to the level of sainthood simply on account of their social and/or religious standing; they had to earn that status by their virtuous behaviour. The criteria for the inclusion in this exalted club were set by ecclesiastics who developed for that purpose the ideal of the just ruler, *rex iustus*, who defended both Church and faith.

If one assumes that Scandinavian and Germanic kingship carried with it a sacral baggage into the Christian era, one is still faced with the task of establishing a credible link between this state of affairs and the emergence of the princely cults. "Sacral kingship" is a concept that, if it is to signify anything, refers to the belief that the ruler stood in a supernatural relationship with the gods and was perceived as an intermediary between his people and the divine.²⁷ It hardly

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁴ Graus 1965, pp. 314–323.

²⁵ Nelson 1973, pp. 29–44. Ridyard 1988, pp. 74–78. See the comments in Chaney 1991, pp. 684–686.

²⁶ Ridyard 1988, p. 78.

²⁷ On the problem of defining this concept see, Mc Turk 1975–1976, pp. 139–169. *Idem*, 1994, pp. 18–32.

needs emphasising that this is precisely the essence of saints' cults in general; from their exalted place the saints act as intercessors between God and men. Viewed from this perspective there is little left to explain and any distinctions between pagan and Christian sentiments become irrelevant. Just as people before had called upon the pagan gods or other supernatural identities in their hour of need, they now looked for help from the Christian saints whether royal or otherwise.

Problems arise, however, when an attempt is made to demonstrate pagan influence on the origins of the royal cults by reading the relevant (for the most part) hagiographic corpus through the prism of pagan myths and legends. Men of the Church wrote the sources in a Christian context, usually in order to promote the sanctity of particular secular rulers. Whatever pagan notions were behind the popular veneration of the martyred princes, the literature on them is thoroughly Christian in nature. Accordingly, an attempt to establish a pagan dimension to these cults by scrutinising the Lives of the saints, invites a highly selective form of argumentation where any feature of the text, which vaguely resembles pre-Christian customs or traditions, is presented as attestation of the pagan dimension of the same cult. In other words, sources that are inherently alien to the concept of pagan origin are examined in order to support preconceived assumptions about the emergence of the princely cults. To take an example, William Chaney places the wolf that finds and guards the severed head of King Edmund in Abbo of Fleury's late tenth-century *passio* within the context of beliefs associated with Wotan and the alleged tradition that this particular animal was the guardian spirit of the royal house of East Anglia.²⁸ As a counter-argument it could be pointed out that this scene bears a notable resemblance to a scene in the well-known Life of St Mary of Egypt in *Vitae Patrum*.²⁹ One can also mention the often repeated assertion that St Ólafr's pictorial attribute, the battle-axe, represents a transference of Þór's giant-bashing hammer on to the Norwegian saint is a scholarly myth which can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Anne Lidén's study of St Ólafr in medieval art shows that the saint's axe is a thoroughly Christian symbol of protective justice and, as such, aligns

²⁸ Chaney 1970, p. 82.

²⁹ Gransden 1992, p. 87.

perfectly with the image of Ólafr that was presented by ecclesiastics at least from the 1160s onwards.³⁰

In Anglo-Saxon hagiography the fertility of the kingdom is sometimes associated with the martyr's sanctity.³¹ Chaney argues that the cults of the princely martyrs in Anglo-Saxon England were dependent on the pagan belief that a sacrificial immolation of the king guaranteed miraculous bounty.³² Here one should consider the common association in Christian tradition between bad kingship and natural disasters, on the one hand, and good kingship with bounty of nature and general well-being on the other hand. In this context the most influential work was the seventh-century Irish text *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, attributed to an author usually referred to as Pseudo-Cyprianus,³³ a text known in Anglo-Saxon England as early as the second half of the eighth century.³⁴ Indeed in Aelnoth of Canterbury's *Gesta Svenomagni*, bad harvest and pestilence follow the killing of the *rex iustus* King Knud and the subsequent accession to the throne of Olaf hunger, his unpopular brother.³⁵ The contrast Aelnoth depicts between the state of the Danish kingdom in the reign of the two kings must be read with this learned Christian tradition regarding the cosmic significance of good and bad kingship in mind. Although it cannot be conclusively shown that Aelnoth was directly influenced in this by Pseudo-Cyprianus, he was clearly familiar with a similar tradition.³⁶

Edward S. Reisman has argued that the Norse paganism of the Varangians in Rus' contributed to the emergence of the cult of Boris and Gleb.³⁷ An early *passio* of the Kievan saints tells how the pierced

³⁰ Lidén, A., 1997.

³¹ See for instance the *passio* of St Edward. *Edward King and Martyr*, p. 3.

³² Chaney 1970, pp. 77–85. Hoffmann further develops this idea in relation to Scandinavian martyrs. He has, however, been criticised for failing to acknowledge that some of the motifs he interprets as indicating pagan influence appear in Lives of confessor saints. See Mathé 1978, p. 66.

³³ *Pseudo-Cyprianus, De XII Abusivis Saeculi*, ed. by S. Hellmann. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 34 (Berlin, 1909), pp. 50–55. Pseudo-Cyprian was influenced by Old Testament models of good and bad kingship rather than any pagan notions, Nelson 1996, p. 9.

³⁴ Meens 1988, p. 354.

³⁵ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 130–132.

³⁶ Curt Weibull argued that Aelnoth had been directly influenced by Pseudo-Cyprian. Weibull 1915, pp. 51–75. Disputed by Breengaard 1982, pp. 128–130.

³⁷ Reisman 1988, pp. 141–157.

body of Gleb was thrown between two tree-trunks, or wood coffins.³⁸ This he interpreted as “not an incidental statement of fact but [should be] identified with a sacrificial hanging such as that of the royal victims in the Odinic sacrifice”.³⁹ Not only does this overlook the most obvious explanation for this narrative detail, that burial of the dead in hollowed/out tree trunks was not uncommon among the Slavs,⁴⁰ but it also makes the brave leap of associating Óðinn’s self-immolation on the gallow-tree, as presented in Old Norse sources, with the martyrdom of a Christian prince as described in hagiographic texts. Although it was not observed by Reisman, a few years earlier Erich Hoffmann had made a comparable connection between the self-sacrifice of the German god of war and princely martyrdom.⁴¹ Hoffmann, moreover, argued that the populace were familiar with the notion of martyrdom of kings through the pagan concept of the Odinic sacrifice, in which a ruler is ritually killed as an offering to the god of war and poetry. Leaving aside the fact that the sources for such sacrifices are largely derived from thirteenth-century or later Icelandic Legendary sagas, we are dealing with parallels that can only be drawn when the literary context in which they are found is left by the wayside.

In her *Den hellige kongen. Om religion og herskermakt fra vikingtid til middelalder* (2000), Gro Steinsland has provided a more general presentation of the pagan dimensions to St Ólafr’s cult. In this study the early impact of the cult is interpreted within the context of a *mythos* relating to the destiny-designed death of kings which is apparently attested in pagan skaldic poems, most notably *Ynglingatal*, and echoes of which are later heard in the Kings’ saga. Ólafr’s martyrdom thus functioned as a kind of focal point for older indigenous pagan sentiments and imported Christian ideas about triumph through death and martyrdom.⁴² This interesting hypothesis suffers, unavoidably, from the absence of any *contemporary* evidence from Norway which

³⁸ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus’*, p. 193.

³⁹ Reisman 1978, p. 150.

⁴⁰ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus’*, p. 242 (fn. 49).

⁴¹ Hoffmann 1975, pp. 46–58. The parallels between Christ’s martyrdom on the cross, pierced with a lance, and the self-immolation of the Óðinn, pierced by a spear, has not escaped the attention of scholars studying the conversion of the Germanic people. See for instance Gerstein 1974, pp. 140–145.

⁴² Steinsland 2001, esp. pp. 66–68; 158–159; pp. 130–138; p. 186. Steinsland 2004. See also Krag’s criticism of the work, Krag 2001.

suggests it was the manner of Ólafr's death which specifically attracted the general populace to his cult in the first place rather than, for example, the miracles performed at his shrine. Indeed one notes in that it is the saint's shrine/corporal relic which receives most attention in Þórarinn loftunga *Glælognskviða* and Sighvatr's *Eyfdrápa*. Of course foreign sources from eleventh century testify to St Ólafr's status as a martyr,⁴³ and the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics undoubtedly emphasised this dimension to the cult. But we are in the dark as to how the Norwegian population interpreted the death of King Ólafr and to what extent this interpretation contributed to the cult's popularity in its earliest stage. What we do know, however, is that in the second half of the twelfth century the image of Ólafr the martyr is presented in the literature composed under the auspices of the archbishopric of Nidaros.

The difficulty with discussing the origins of the princely martyr-cults in terms of pagan influences is obvious. As pointed out by one Old Rus' scholar the "pagan hypothesis" may help to

... explain the prominence of these cults in northern Europe, but does not contribute to the interpretation of the actual texts, which describe political murders in terms of Christian martyrdom. The ideology remains in large part conventional. The Lives of Wenceslas and Magnus, and the early eulogies in their honour, do not develop themes that distinguish their cult from that of other saints: there is the same stress on the saint as an edifying example of Christ-like virtue and heavenly intercessor able to help the individual in need.⁴⁴

Another observation is that although pagan ideas regarding the nature of kingship may have filtered into the Christian era, this did not necessarily result in the appearance of princely saints' cults. A notable case is Ireland where the evidence for sacral kingship surviving into Christian times is just as strong, and arguably stronger, than in Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England.⁴⁵ Nevertheless there are precious few examples of Irish kings being associated with sanctity and none with martyrdom.⁴⁶ In fact the single association of an Irish king

⁴³ For instance, Edward the Confessor's donation of 1064 to a St Olav's church refers to St Ólafr as a martyr. See Østrem 2001, p. 30 and the reference provided there.

⁴⁴ Price 1993, pp. 109–110.

⁴⁵ Maier 1989, 12–32. Aitchison 1994, pp. 45–75. See also the observations of Wormald 1986, pp. 151–158.

⁴⁶ Ó Corráin 1982, pp. 226–229. On the killing of Irish kings and its possible

with sainthood following his violent death appears in the *Njáls saga's* description of the battle of Clontarf in 1014. In this late thirteenth-century Icelandic text the blood of the fallen Brian Boru, king of Munster, heals the wound of a boy who has bravely attempted to shield the king from attack.⁴⁷

Indeed men of letters from the two regions of Europe where princely cults were most prominent, England and Scandinavia, commented on the absence of native martyrs in Ireland, royal or otherwise. This is mentioned in a speech which Gerald of Wales, in his *Topographia Hibernica*, attributes to the archbishop of Cashel,⁴⁸ a speech that was adopted into the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá* (*King's Mirror*) composed in the mid thirteenth century: "bloodthirsty though they [i.e. the Irish] are, they have never slain any of the saints who are so numerous in the land; the holy men who have dwelt there have died on their sick bed".⁴⁹ In Irish society the concept of a native

ritual association see Aitchison 1998, pp. 108–125. There is some evidence that royal saints were not unknown in early medieval Scotland. Thus in the so-called 'Dunkeld Litany', of which some parts appear to stem from the late ninth century, King Constantin (d. 820) is listed under confessors while the name of two other kings, another Constantin (probably the one who was killed by Norsemen in 876) and King Aimbchellach (killed by his brother in 719) are entered alongside martyrs. Clanchy 2002, pp. 419–420.

⁴⁷ *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 453. Although the Irish sources present Brian Boru as a devout Christian and a *rex iustus* they do not hint at the king's sanctity. In the *Wars of the Gaedhill with the Gaill* Brian Boru prays in his tent during the battle of Clontarf and following his killing he is compared to Moses, Solomon and David. *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill. The Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and other Norsemen*. The original Irish text, tr. and introd. by J. H. Todd. Rolls Series (London, 1867), pp. 197–205. In a poem apparently composed in the late twelfth century (partially derivative of the *Wars of the Gaedhill with the Gaill*), angels carry Brian's sinless soul to heaven. See the edition and translation of this poem in Goedherr 1938, p. 55. *Njáls saga*, probably following an earlier *Brjáns saga*, is thus the first source to present King Brian Boru as a saint. Interestingly, the Icelandic author appears to have modelled Brian's healing miracle on a scene in *Breta sogur*, a translation, or rather an adaptation, of Geoffrey of Monmouth *Historia regum Britanniae*. The scene involves St Oswald of Northumbria and does not figure in Geoffrey's work. About this scene, see van Hamel 1936, pp. 240–241.

⁴⁸ *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, vol. v. *Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. by James F. Dimock. Rolls Series (London, 1869), pp. 178–179. On the context of this remark see, Gougaud 1907, pp. 360–370. The archbishop does, however, add that now when the English have arrived the Irish will indeed be provided with martyrs. However, as pointed out by Brendan Smith, "it took the English 500 years to provide with its only canonized martyr, and then the choice fell on the impeccably colonial Oliver Plunkett (archbishop of Armagh, 1669–81)". Smith 2002, p. 240.

⁴⁹ "en sva drapgiarner sëm þeir ero oc sva marger sëm hælger ero iþeira lannde þa hafa þeir

king being exalted to the level of sainthood appears to have been alien. This, at least, is suggested in the preface to the ninth-century *Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* where the splendour of the early martyrs is contrasted with the ephemeral fame of earthly rulers. Whereas the graves of the Christian martyrs are justly honoured, no one knows or cares where Nero and Pontius Pilate are buried. The author then proceeds to contrast the posthumous powers of the kings Donnachad (d. 795) and Bran of Leinster (d. 797) with that of St MaelRuáin (d. 792):

Donnchad the wrathful, ruddy, chosen or victorious
 Bran of the Barrow, visiting their tombs takes not from me
 the weariness of weakness.

MaelRuáin after his pious service, the great sun on Meath's south plain, at his grave with purity is healed the sigh of every heart.⁵⁰

Clearly sanctity and Irish kingship do not go together: "Though haughty are earthly kings in robes that are brightest, they will perish after abundance, each goes before another".⁵¹

There is probably sufficient evidence to conclude that well into the early modern period Scandinavian rulers were seen to possess supernatural powers denied to lesser mortals.⁵² A general belief of this sort, which some may wish to call pagan, could well have contributed to the appeal of the princely cults, particularly in the cases of popular saints such as Ólafr of Norway and Magnús of Orkney. But, as has already been stressed in the second and the third parts of this study, the fundamental reasons for the emergence of the princely cults must be sought in the political and ecclesiastical situation in the Nordic lands in our period. Again Ireland provides a useful point of contrast. Although scholars may differ in their interpretation of the role played by the Irish kings in the conversion of the island, it can be safely maintained that their contribution to that

engan dræpit af þeim oc aller þeir hælger menn sëm þar ero þa hafa aller sot dauðer orðel'. Konungs skuggsjá. Speculum Regale, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København, 1920), p. 51.

⁵⁰ *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé. The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. by Whitley Stokes (London 1905), p. 26. For the contest of this passage, see Hughes 1979, p. 450. Regarding the dating and context of this work as a whole, see Dumville 2002 and Hughes 1972, pp. 210–222.

⁵¹ *Félire Óengusso*, p. 27.

⁵² See for instance Gunnes 1974, pp. 149–158. Sundqvist 2002, pp. 18–38.

process was significantly less than that of their Scandinavian counterparts.⁵³ Thus after the initial period of conversion the Church—again I allow myself to use this blanket term for convenience sake—did not rely on royal patronage to the same degree as it did in Scandinavia. To simplify a complicated issue, it is clear that the Irish Church adapted itself remarkably quickly to the existing social structure. Most notably, one appealing aspect of monasticism in Ireland was that it aligned remarkably well with prevailing structures of kinship and clientage.⁵⁴ From the seventh century onwards, powerful families endowed monasteries with land that in turn became family possessions in perpetuity. The abbots were often of royal stock and, in a sense, presided over their domain in a similar way as their secular kinsmen. Thus from very early on the Irish Church “fitted cosily into the society in which they [the churches] found themselves”,⁵⁵ and in time it became just “as much a political unit as any ‘tribal’ kingdom”.⁵⁶ The typical Irish saint was the great monastic founders, the abbots of the major houses, eremitical monks and pious nuns.

The Church in early-Christian Scandinavia was naturally very much involved in secular life, if only because from the early twelfth century onwards its most prominent members were recruited from noble circles. Hence we should be wary of drawing too sharp a distinction between the Church and secular society. But it is clear that in the process of both converting the Scandinavians to Christianity and constructing an effective ecclesiastical structure, men of the cloth were heavily dependent on the patronage and the protection of the secular arm. A case in point is the scant evidence for monastic houses in the eleventh century. It was mainly in the power of the kings to donate land for such foundations, but in this early period they were for the most part unwilling, or perhaps unable, to do so.⁵⁷ In turn, the rulers relied on the spiritual authority both to bestow legitimacy

⁵³ Stancliffe 1980, pp. 59–95.

⁵⁴ Richard Fletcher 1995, p. 91. Some scholars have, however, emphasized that this was a long-drawn-out process: the “real absorption of the church into Irish society happened during the seventh to the eleventh centuries, a process in which the church was moulded to the secular pattern to a degree not found elsewhere in western Europe”. Sharpe 1984, p. 268.

⁵⁵ Ó Corráin 1981, p. 332.

⁵⁶ Sharpe 1981, p. 269.

⁵⁷ Abrams 1996, pp. 25–27.

on their own authority and to bring greater political and social cohesion to their dominions through the homogeneous effect of the new religion. This symbiosis between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* goes some way to explain the willingness of clerical communities and ecclesiastics to bestow saintly status on secular learders.

5.2. *The Princely Saints as Heavenly Patrons*

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to exclude the possibility that certain elements in the mentality and traditions of Scandinavians struck a chord with the basic assumption which underlay the princely saints' cults: that a deceased ruler could be of beneficial influence to the living.⁵⁸ Especially noteworthy in this respect is the ubiquitous tradition in the Old Norse sources of the princely saint as both an overlord of a specific dominion and a guardian to his successors. A convenient starting point for a brief examination of this tradition—an examination that in the context of this study can only be suggestive rather than exhaustive—is the following passage in *OS*:

Nu er þat mitt ræd, at leita þangat traustz, er nogt er til, at sa unni ydr rikis er æa at rettu; enn þat er hinn helgi Magnus iarl, modurbrodur ydvarr. Vil ek, at þu heitir æa hann, at hann unni ydr frændleifdar þinnar ok sinnar erfdar, at þu latir gera steinmusteri i Orkneyium i Kirkiuvøgi, er þu fær þat riki, þat er ecki se annat dyrdligra i því landi, ok latir Magnusi iarli helga, frænda þinum; ok leggir þar fee til, svo at sæ stadr mætti eflaz, ok yrði þangat komit hans helgum domi ok byskupsstolinum með.⁵⁹

Now, here's my advice: look for support where men will say the true owner of the realm granted it you, and that's the holy Earl Magnus, your uncle. I want you to make a vow to him, that should he grant you your family inheritance and his own legacy, and should you come to power, then you'll build a stone minster at Kirkwall more magnificent than any in Orkney, that you'll have it dedicated to your uncle the

⁵⁸ What follows is to a degree an elaboration on an theme that has been addressed by other scholars. For instance, Lange 1958, p. 118. Hoffmann 1975, pp. 77–89. Chaney 1979, pp. 90–125.

⁵⁹ *OS*, p. 176.

holy Earl Magnus and provide it with all the funds it will need to flourish. In addition, his holy relics and the episcopal seat must be moved there.⁶⁰

Kolr Kalason is said to have addressed these words to his son on the eve of Rögnvaldr's second expedition to the Northern Isles in 1137. As mentioned, the success of this undertaking brought Rögnvaldr to power and arguably secured the future of St Magnús' cult (see ch. 2.2.). Although it is seriously doubtful whether Kolr actually spoke these words on this occasion, or others to the same effect, the sentiments expressed by the saga author are still worth exploring.

The Orkney saint is presented as the ultimate ruler of the earldom and it is within his right to bestow that authority on whomsoever he deems worthy. Also integral to the passage is the concept of gift-exchange; Rögnvaldr should recognise the supreme status of Magnús and vow to build a church in his honour if the saint facilitates his rise to power. A similar notion of reciprocity between an aspiring ruler and a princely saint can be found in *Heimskringla* where King Haraldr gilli promises to build a church and dedicate it to Ólafr if the saint aids him to victory against his co-ruler, King Magnús Sigurðarson.⁶¹ Furthermore, it is possible to read two distinct but still related strands of ideas into Kolr Kalason's speech: Magnús is the ultimate lord of the earldom and it is in the saint's power to allow Rögnvaldr, his nephew, to rule over it in his name. The association of the princely saints with a specific dominion is a common theme in the Old Norse corpus, particularly in relation to St Ólafr of Norway. Although it is not unknown for saints to perform miracles outside their realm,⁶² in the sagas their supernatural

⁶⁰ *The Orkneyinga saga*, p. 130.

⁶¹ *Heimskringla* III, p. 286. One is inevitably reminded here of Thietmar of Merseburg's description of how Otto I prepared for the battle of Lechfeld in 955: "The next day, that is on the feast of the martyr of Christ, Lawrence, the king alone prostrated himself before the others and confessed his sin to God, tearfully swearing the following oath: if on that day, through the intercession of such a great advocate, Christ would deign to grant him victory and life, he would establish a bishopric in the city of Merseburg in honour of the victor over the fire and turn his newly begun palace there into a church." *Ottoman Germany. The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, tr. and annotated by David. A. Warner (Manchester and New York 2001), II, X, p. 98.

⁶² For instance, the healing miracle that Magnús performs in Norway. *MSL*, pp. 381–383.

authority generally extends to the territory over which they had ruled. In other words, the princely saints “performed the same function after death that they had in life—the protection and care of their subjects and lands . . . [and] they were able to remain princes after death for all time”.⁶³

A comparable concept also appears in hagiography on confessor saints,⁶⁴ for instance in Arngrímr Brandsson’s saga about Bishop Guðmundr Arason from around the middle of the fourteenth century. Arngrímr’s work contains *Rannveigarleiðsla* (the *Vision of Rannveig*) which is the sole surviving native vision recorded in medieval Iceland. *Rannveigarleiðsla* tells that Rannveig, an adulterous woman, had experienced a vision in the winter of 1198 which she later narrated to Guðmundr Arason, then a priest but later bishop of Hólar (1203–1237) and posthumously a popular saint. Rannveig reported that she had suddenly fallen into a trance in which she was escorted by demons through a desert landscape. At a point when Rannveig was on the verge of being dragged into a boiling cauldron, she had the presence of mind to call on St Ólafr, St Magnús and St Hallvard, the “most venerated saints of that time”. At the very same instance a great light appeared over her head and the demons dispersed. The sources of the light were the three Scandinavian martyrs who introduce themselves and then display to her the glories of heaven. They then enter a magnificent palace where St Ólafr leads Rannveig into a splendid room and addresses her in the following manner:

... sér þú herbergi þetta, svá signat ok sæmiligt, er jafnan stendr án flekk ok fölnan ok með sama ríkdómi ok úlíðandi gleði? Sjá er eignarjörð ok óðal Guðmundar Arasonar, er fá mun um síðir eigi lægra sess en Thomas í Kantia, ok svo sem vér fullting veitum Noregi ok Orkneyjum, svó mun hann hjálpa Ísland með sínum bænum.⁶⁵

... see you this room, blessed and honourable, that always stands without fading or being tarnished and with the same authority and everlasting joy? This is the ancestral land and patrimony of Guðmundr Arason, who will soon not be placed lower than Thomas of Canterbury, and as we aid Norway and Orkney, thus he will help Iceland with his prayers.⁶⁶

⁶³ Cherniavsky 1969, pp. 13–14. Referring here to the princely martyrs of Rus’.

⁶⁴ Moore 1997, pp. 60–61.

⁶⁵ *Biskupa sögur*, vol. II, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Jón Sigurðsson (København, 1878), pp. 10–11.

⁶⁶ My own translation.

The ancestral land allotted to Guðmundr Arason is Iceland just as Norway has been assigned to Ólafr and Hallvard and Orkney to Magnús.⁶⁷

But the idea that the princely saints in heaven guarded the dominions that they had ruled over in their earthly life appears to have been especially well established in the Scandinavian lands. In particular, the frequent manifestation of this idea in non-hagiographic works points in that direction. A note can be made of a passage, which was discussed in a different context earlier in this study (see footnote 33 on pp. 11–12), in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, written by Sturla Þórðarson in 1260s at the instigation of King Hákon IV of Norway. The saga tells that when King Alexander II of Scotland was preparing the conquest of the Hebrides in 1249, which at that point was under Norwegian rule, he dreamt a dream:

... honum þotti koma at ser .iiij. menn. þotti honum einn vera með konungligum skrudu sa var miok ohryligr ríodr í andlíti ok hellr drígr meðalmandr vexti. annar mandr syndiz honum granvaxinn ok dreingiligr ok allra manna frídazstr ok tíguligazstr. enn þrídri var myklu mestr vexti ok allra þeira ofrynilgazstr. sa var miok framsnodinn. sa varp ordum a konunginn ok spurdi ef hann ætladi til Sudreyia. hann þottiz suara at þat var vist at hann ætladi undir sig at leggja eyiarnar. draummadrinn bad hann aptr snua. kuad honum eigi annat hlyda skyldu. Konungr sagdi drauminn ok fystu flestir at hann skyldi aftr huerfa enn konungr villdi þat eigi. ok litlu sídar tok Alexandr konungr sott ok andadiz. ... Sudreyingar segia at þessir menn er konungi synduz í suefni væri hinn heilagi Ólafr konungr or Noregi ok inn heilagi Magnús jarl af Orkneyium ok enn helgi Kolumba.⁶⁸

He thought that three men came to him. He thought that one was dressed in a royal apparel; this man was very frowning and red-faced and average in figure. The second man seemed to him tall, and slender, and youthful; the most beautiful of men, and nobly dressed. The third was by far the largest in figure, and the most frowning of them all. He was very bald in front. He spoke to the king and asked whether he intended to go to the Hebrides. He thought he answered that he would indeed conquer the isles. The dream-man asked him to turn back, and said to him that he would not hear of anything else. ... The king told his dream; and most wished him to turn back, but he

⁶⁷ This vision was probably first recorded in the so-called *Prestssaga* of Bishop Guðmundr Arason, written in the first half of the thirteenth century. On the imagery in this passage see Hallberg 1987, p. 130.

⁶⁸ *Flateyjarbók* vol. III, p. 178.

would not do that. And a short time after he fell ill and died . . . The Hebrideans say that these men who appeared to the king in his sleep were St Ólafr, king of Norway, St Magnús Earl of Orkney and St Columba.⁶⁹

The appearance of the three saints to King Alexander emphasises the wrongfulness of his cause. In tandem the heavenly patrons of the parties involved—representing Norway, the earldom of Orkney and the kingdom of Scotland—admonish the Scottish king to confine himself within the realm that Columba had allotted him. He should refrain from attempting to extend his authority to lands, which lie within the sphere of influence of the two Norse saints: “And thus by the judgement of God it came about that he who had desired to invade another’s land lost his life and his kingdom.”⁷⁰ At the other end of the spectrum there is Earl Haraldr ungi whose attempt to gain power in Orkney ended with his death in battle against Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson in 1197/98 (see ch. 4.3.). He was buried in Caithness and people are said to have venerated him as a saint. The saga also adds that this popular leader performed numerous miracles “as a reminder that Harald wished to go to Orkney and join his kinsmen [and saints], Earl Magnús and Earl Rognvald”. Just as his lordship did not extend to the heartland of the Orkney earldom during his lifetime, unlike that of St Magnús and St Rögnvaldr, after his death his supernatural power was confined to the more peripheral region.

⁶⁹ My own translation. It is noteworthy here that (at least) the kernel of this story—i.e. Alexander’s refusal to heed Columba’s warning—was not entirely made up by Sturla Þórðarson for in Matthew Paris’ (d. 1259) *Chronica Majora* we are told that King Alexander acted unjustly when he moved against a local ruler, a certain Ewen of Lorn. Then Matthew adds “*unde offensam incurrit Dei et sancti Columkille qui in partibus illis jacet et honoratur, et multorum nobelium*”. *Mathei Parisiensis. Monachi Sancti Albani. Chronica Majora*. Vol.V: A.D. 1248 to A.D. 1259, ed. by H. R. Luard. Rolls Series (London, 1880), pp. 88–89. In both Matthew’s chronicle and *Hákonar saga* the emphasis is on Alexander’s unjust behaviour; the king exceeds his authority when he undertakes the military expedition to the Western Isles. For the background to this episode see Cowan 1990, pp. 103–132. On St Columba as a patron saint in Scotland, see Clanchy 1997, pp. 1–26.

⁷⁰ “*Sicque iusto Dei iudicio factum est ut qui aliena inuadere concupierat, uitam cum regno amitteret*”. *The Miracles of St Aebbe of Coldingham and St Margaret of Scotland*, ed. and tr. by Robert Bartlett (Oxford, 2003). These words are from the *Miracula* of Margaret of Scotland where the saintly queen, like Columba in *Hákonar saga*, is presented as the eternal protector of Scotland. She fights against the Norwegian king at Largs for she had, in her own words, “accepted this kingdom from God, and it is entrusted to me and my heirs for ever.” *Ibid.*, p. 89.

The second strand in Kolr's speech—the close identification of the saint with his chosen successor—emerges from several incidents in the Old Norse corpus which mainly involve St Ólafr of Norway. *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna* and *Ágrip* tell that the night prior to the battle of Hlýrskógarheiði (in 1043) the Norwegian saint appeared in a dream to King Magnús góði, his son and heir. Ólafr encouraged Magnús to stand firm and promised to help him in the coming battle against the pagan Wends.⁷¹ The tradition that Ólafr aided Magnús to victory on this particular occasion is not unique to the Kings' saga for it also appears in the hagiographic poem *Geisli* from the middle of the twelfth century.⁷² A similar scene is found in *Knýtlinga saga* where King Valdemar has a vision of his father, St Knud Lavard, prior to the important battle of Grathehed in 1157. The saint assures his son that God (and himself) will come to his aid.⁷³ Just as Rögnvaldr's success over Earl Páll was integral to the promotion of St Magnús' cult, thus King Valdemar's victory in battle against King Sven Eriksson proved decisive for the future of Knud Lavard's cult. A note can also be made of a passage in the fragmentarily preserved *vita et miracula* of Knud Lavard by Robert of Ely (c. 1135). The parents of the martyr initially planned to name him Hugo but then St Knud of Odense, his grandfather, intervened. The martyr appeared in a vision to a certain Aslac (i.e. Áslákr) and tells him that the child should rather be named after himself: "*quia ipse sublimabit Rincstadium, sicut ego Othoniam*".⁷⁴ Again a princely saint steers a descendant or a successor on the right course.

Snorri Sturluson tells how Ólafr helped his brother, Haraldr harðráði, to escape from captivity in Constantinople and hence cleared the way for his return to Norway.⁷⁵ *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna* report that St Ólafr advised his brother against embarking on the military expedition against King Harold in 1066. In a dream Ólafr declares that he will not aid or protect Haraldr dur-

⁷¹ *Heimskringla* III, p. 43. *Fagrskinna*, p. 210. *Ágrip*, pp. 220–221.

⁷² *Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning* A I, pp. 464–465.

⁷³ *Knýtlinga Saga*, p. 292. In Adomnan's Life of Columba the saint appears in a dream to King Oswald the night before a decisive battle against an heathen army and promises to aid him to victory. *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, ed. with transl. and notes by A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (New York, 1961) I, i, pp. 200–201.

⁷⁴ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 234.

⁷⁵ *Heimskringla* III, pp. 85–86.

ing his undertaking; the king must depend on his own luck. It is needless to recount how his expedition ended.⁷⁶ Norway is St Ólafr's patrimony and he is unwilling or unable to apply his supernatural authority to a reckless invasion of a foreign dominion. In *Morkinskinna* King Sigurðr the Crusader (1103–1130) dreams that he and his two brothers and co-regents are sitting on a single bench in Christ Church, Oslo. St Ólafr approaches the three kings and leads away two of them, Ólafr (1103–1116) and Eysteinn (1103–1123), while leaving Sigurðr behind. Eysteinn interprets this dream as foretelling that Sigurðr will outlive his co-regents which he subsequently does.⁷⁷ The role of St Ólafr in *Sverris saga* is also conspicuous. A pivotal event in the saga occurs shortly after Sverrir is told of his "real" parentage, i.e. that he is the son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson. At that point Ólafr appears to Sverrir in a dream and promises to aid him in the struggle against the reigning king of Norway, Magnús Erlingsson.⁷⁸ It is this vision which finally convinces Sverrir of his rightful claim to the throne.

In *Heimskringla* King Ólafr Tryggvason appears in a dream to Ólafr Haraldsson and presents him with the options of staying at the court of Grand-Duke Jaroslav or returning to Norway and reclaiming his rightful inheritance.⁷⁹ God had chosen Ólafr Tryggvason to bring Christianity to Norway who in turn invests his namesake with the honour of becoming the eternal lord of the kingdom. *Fagrskinna* (adopted by Snorri in *Heimskringla*) tells that Hálfðán svarti, allegedly the first king of the dynasty (early ninth-century), was unable to dream. When he is finally cured of this condition he has a vision which prefigures (in a highly symbolic fashion) the glory of his descendants, particularly that of St Ólafr.⁸⁰ In short the personal relationship between rulers, especially the Norwegian kings, and their saintly predecessors, is clearly attested in the Scandinavian sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, most often in the form of dreams and visions.⁸¹ Although scenes of this nature are included for literary

⁷⁶ *Fagrskinna*, p. 228. *Heimskringla* III, p. 178. *Morkinskinna*, p. 267.

⁷⁷ *Morkinskinna*, pp. 358–359.

⁷⁸ *Sverris Saga*, pp. 4–5.

⁷⁹ *Heimskringla* II, pp. 340–341.

⁸⁰ *Fagrskinna*, pp. 4–5. *Heimskringla* I, pp. 90–91.

⁸¹ In general there is a close association between the kings of the Ynglingar dynasty and dream visions. Pointed out by Chadwick 1968, p. 43.

effect in the sagas they also point to a tradition that is alive and relevant. In particular, this is suggested by their appearance in contemporary or near contemporary works such as *Sverris saga*. In this work the link between Sverrir and St Ólafr is clearly played up for propaganda purposes, to demonstrate that Sverrir's claim to kingship was supported and hallowed by the "eternal king of Norway".⁸² But considering that "even the most primitive propaganda has to correspond to intimately-linked conceptions and motivations if it is to be effective",⁸³ there must surely have been a genuine belief in the phenomenon under discussion. If this was not the case, its prominence in a propagandistic work like *Sverris saga* is difficult to account for.⁸⁴

A variation on the same theme—that a deceased ruler could influence the career of a chosen successor and bestow legitimacy on his rule—appears in the well-known episode of Ólafr Geirstaðaálfr, preserved in six variant versions of both Norwegian and Icelandic provenance which date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. All six versions derive from a lost proto-type that was in all probability composed in Norway as early as the second half of twelfth-century.⁸⁵ Ólafr Guðrøðarson (better known as Geirstaðaálfr), who in the ninth century supposedly ruled as a king in Vestfold, appears in dream to a certain Hrani and commands him to break into his burial-mound, kill the figure he finds therein (which is the king him-

⁸² *Sverrir Saga*, p. 4.

⁸³ Wolfram 1994, p. 38. Herwig Wolfram is here commenting on the supposed belief in the divine origin of peoples and tribes in early medieval Europe.

⁸⁴ This, of course, does not mean that Icelandic authors did not elaborate on this theme or make up scenes of this sort for dramatic or other purposes. For instance, in the fifteenth-century *Hrafnar þáttur Guðrúnarsonar* King Magnús góði is on his way to fight King Sven Estridssen of Denmark when he hears that an Icelander is in his presence who had slain one of his men. The king plans to have him prosecuted but, through the invocation of Sighvatr Þórðarson, the former court-poet of St Ólafr, the saint appears to his son in a dream and orders him to leave the Icelander in peace and promises him instead a victory over the Danes. Subsequently, some men see St Ólafr fighting alongside Magnús' men and the victory is attributed to his father's intercession. *Vatnsdæla saga—Hallfreðar saga—Kormáks saga—Hrómundar þáttur halta—Hrafnar þáttur Guðrúnarsonar*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslensk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík, 1939), pp. 328–333. This late account is clearly an elaboration on a passage in Snorri's *Heimskringla* where King Magnús tells his men before a battle against Sven Estridssen that St Ólafr will be on their side and secure victory. *Heimskringla* III, p. 47.

⁸⁵ Heinrichs 1989, pp. 112–136. The oldest variant appears in the *Legendary saga* of St Ólafr, a Norwegian work from around 1200. *Olafs saga hins helga*, pp. 30–36.

self in fact), and retrieve from him a sword, a silver ring and a leather-belt. Hrani should then bring these items to Ásta, the daughter of Guðbrandr kúla, who is labouring in childbirth. With the belt strapped around her waist, Ásta will deliver a boy whom Hrani should present with the sword. Hrani follows the instructions and the child born is none other than Ólafr Haraldsson, future king and martyr. Although the episode, as preserved, is a carefully structured piece of work, there is no reason to doubt that it is based on traditional elements.⁸⁶ Moreover, as Anne Heinrichs has shown, the *raison d'être* of *Ólafs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs* is the transference of legitimacy from the dead to the living where authority is symbolised by a sword.⁸⁷ The legitimacy which the *þáttir* underlines is King Ólafr Haraldsson's claim to Norway as his patrimony or *óðal*.⁸⁸

In this respect *Ólafs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs* can be compared to the so-called *Visio Karoli Magni*, written in the 860s or 870s by an unknown cleric living in or around Mainz, which tells how Charlemagne was approached, when he was falling asleep, by a figure carrying a sword.⁸⁹ The emperor asked the unknown person about his identity and was told, "Receive this sword sent from God to protect yourself, and read and remember what is written on it because it will be fulfilled in time". Four, apparently nonsensical, words were written on the blade of the sword which Charlemagne himself interpreted as containing a prophecy relating to the rule of his ancestors. Like *Ólafs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs* the *Visio Karoli* is a subtle piece of literary

⁸⁶ Krag 1999, pp. 21–47.

⁸⁷ Heinrichs 1989, pp. 104–112. Røthe comes to a similar conclusion, albeit by applying a more theoretical approach. Røthe 1997, pp. 573–582.

⁸⁸ Wallendorf 2003, p. 164.

⁸⁹ The vision is edited in Geary 1994 A, pp. 293–294. The translation is taken from this article, *ibid.*, p. 275. A comparison of the relationship between living and dead ruler in the Old Norse corpus and the Carolingian sources shows that in the former the ancestor invariably contacts his successor personally. In the Carolingian sources, on the other hand, the message is usually conveyed through the medium of an ecclesiastic. This clearly reflects "an attempt to introduce the Church as mediator between the living and dead". Geary 1994 A, pp. 291–292. *Idem*, 1994 B, pp. 83–87. In the *Visio Raduini*, for instance, the Virgin Mary appears to a monk of Rheims and informs him that Christ had handed the empire of the Franks over to St Remigius and for that reason the saint had the right to choose who should rule over them. In this vision St Remigius, who had baptised Clovis, is presented as the lord of the Frankish empire as a whole. *Visio Raduini*, ed. by O. Holder-Egger. *Neues Archiv* 11 (1886), pp. 262–263. On visions in the Carolingian period in general, see Dutton 1994.

construction relevant to the political circumstances in which it was composed. But as Patrick Geary has argued, the *Visio Karoli* is probably based on a Germanic tradition that centres around transmission of authority from one generation to the next where the sword figures as a symbolic token of legitimacy.⁹⁰ This term “Germanic” is perhaps superfluous in this context; the tradition was deep-rooted in the milieu of the warrior-aristocracy of medieval Europe.⁹¹ For instance, according to a chronicle account written in the 1290s Earl Warren, when asked by King Edward I to show a warrant for his lands, produced a rusty sword and claimed that with this very weapon his ancestors had acquired his holdings in the Norman Conquest. From his standpoint no further proof was needed.⁹² A century of so earlier King Sverrir Sigurðarson of Norway recounted to his biographer a dream in which St Ólafr presents him with a sword and a banner, thus symbolically investing Sverrir with the Norwegian kingship.⁹³

As the kings and (and would-be kings) of eleventh- and twelfth-century Norway justified their claim to rulership by referring back to Ólafr Haraldsson, thus the authority of the “eternal king of Norway” himself had to be traced back to the pagan era. In this context an important concept is the inalienable right of the family to the *óðal*, the ancestral land, which is handed down from generation to generation. In the ninth stanza of Þórarinn loftunga’s *Glælognskviða* the poet advises King Sven Álfifuson to appeal to St Ólafr that he should allow (*unna*) him to rule Norway. The implication is that the realm is the *óðal* of the saint and thus Sven, in a sense, is an imposter. This explains the almost pleading tone in which the poet tells Sven to approach Ólafr. King Sven is not a relative of the saint and hence he must personally receive the realm from his hands. That

⁹⁰ Geary observes (1994 A and 1994 B) that this tradition often involves mound-breaking and he points out examples from Old Norse literature, most notably from the thirteenth-century *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*. A mention of *Ólaf’s þáttir Geirstaðálf’s* would have further strengthened his argument.

⁹¹ Dutton has, in fact, pointed the biblical dimension to *Visio Karoli* while still emphasising the sword as a symbol of legitimation. Dutton 1994, pp. 202–206.

⁹² On this episode see Clanchy 1993, pp. 35–43. As Clanchy points out, although the veracity of this story can be doubted the tradition behind it is undoubtedly genuine.

⁹³ *Sverrir Saga*, pp. 4–5. For an analysis of this dream and its symbolic meaning, see Busygin 2003.

the notion of Norway as *óðal* of Ólafr was already in place in the second half of the eleventh century is attested in skaldic poetry. In Steinn Herdísarson's *Ólafs drápa* (c. 1070) the poet confidently asserts that Ólafr will not "allow" (*unna*) King Sven Estridssen of Denmark to rule over his *óðal*.⁹⁴ The saint and his grand-son, King Ólafr kyrrí, will ensure that the land will be held by a member of the Norwegian royal dynasty. Again we see the word *unna* applied in relation to St Ólafr and the claim of a Danish king to Norway, although on this occasion in a negative context. It is interesting to note that in Kolr's speech cited at the beginning of this chapter he advises his son to build a magnificent church so that Magnús "*unni ydr frændleifdar þinnar ok sinnar erfðar . . .*". This constitutes yet another instance of the verb "*unna*" appearing in the context of the living looking for the blessing of the dead in relation to rulership over the ancestral land.⁹⁵

The notion of Ólafr Haraldsson as the rightful owner of Norway was expressed in a more concrete and developed manner in the Letter of Privileges (*Privilegiebrev*) issued not long after the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson in 1163/64. In this text the young king acknowledged St Ólafr as his ultimate overlord and presented himself as his substitute ruler on earth (see ch. 3.1.). Attempts have been made to place this document within a wider European context. Most notably, Magnús' vassalage to St Ólafr has been compared with the acknowledgement of eleventh- and twelfth-century rulers that St Peter and hence the Papacy held ultimate lordship over their realms.⁹⁶ In 1059 the Norman warlord Robert Guiscard recognised God and St Peter as the ultimate liege-lords in respect of his lands in southern Italy. About a decade later King Sancho Ramirez of Aragon and Navarre went on a pilgrimage to Rome and delivered his kingdom into the power of God and St Peter.⁹⁷ In 1139 Duke Alfons I of Portugal

⁹⁴ *Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning* A, p. 411.

⁹⁵ The idea that an illustrious ancestor was in the position to guide a living person from beyond, particularly on matters relating to the ancestral land, was not confined to kings and saints. In Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*, completed around the middle of the thirteenth century, we are told that in 1202 Snorri Sturluson was considering leaving his ancestral farm Borg for Reykholt. A man on his farm dreams that a mutual ancestor of his and Snorri's, none other than the legendary Egill Skallagrímsson, warns Snorri not to leave the homestead. *Sturlunga saga* I, p. 211.

⁹⁶ Koch 1934–1936, pp. 81–109. On this phenomenon in general, see Fried 1980. On saints as patrons of political identities in the early medieval period, see Thacker 2000.

⁹⁷ Fried 1980, pp. 64–87.

swore an oath of vassalage to a papal legate and four decades later Pope Alexander III formally bestowed on him the title of king.⁹⁸ The recognition of St Peter as ultimate overlord of their realms ostensibly neutralised any claims of suzerainty from foreign rulers. Similarly Magnús' recognition of St Ólafr as his only liege-lord can be seen as rebuttal of claims to south-eastern Norway made by the Danish kings in this period.⁹⁹ It has also been pointed out that the very form of the *Privilegiebrev* was likely based on a foreign model. Around the middle of the twelfth century a forged letter was produced in St Denis abbey near Paris, which stated that Charlemagne had placed his empire under the suzerainty of St Dionysius and granted the abbey extensive privileges. In fact a comparison of the style and content of the two documents reveals that this very letter influenced the *Privilegiebrev*.¹⁰⁰

Although these European parallels are both interesting and relevant, they in no way diminish the unique features of the relationship between the Norwegian kings and St Ólafr. To begin with there is a considerable difference between, on the one hand, the act of recognising the over-lordship of a saintly predecessor and, on the other hand, submitting the land to St Peter and the Holy See. Norway is, to my best knowledge, a unique case in this respect. The only comparable example is the status of St Wenceslas within Bohemia. At the end of the tenth century Bohemia was referred as *terra S. Wenseslai* and he 'was more than the patron saint of the state: the reigning duke or king was conceived as his representative, in much the same way as, on the highest level, the Byzantine emperor was the vicar of Christ'.¹⁰¹ Just as King Magnús góði apparently had coins struck with the image of St Ólafr during his reign in Denmark (1042–47),¹⁰² the Bohemian rulers of the eleventh century portrayed their celestial patron, St Wenceslas, on their seals¹⁰³ and coins.¹⁰⁴ In

⁹⁸ Robinson 1990, pp. 303–304, 369–372.

⁹⁹ If that was the case it would be most logical to date the *Privilegiebrev* to around 1170. Helle 1974, pp. 70–71.

¹⁰⁰ Schreiner 1946–1948, pp. 518–534. For a discussion of this see Tobiasen 1964, pp. 183–219.

¹⁰¹ Vlasto 1970, p. 96.

¹⁰² Becker 1983, pp. 42–47.

¹⁰³ Graus 1961, p. 57.

¹⁰⁴ Wolverson, pp. 166–173.

addition, whereas the acts of King Sancho, Robert Guiscard and Alfons I represented a novelty in their respective realms, the attitudes expressed in the Letter of Privileges can be traced to the second half of the eleventh century. King Magnús' acknowledgement of St Ólaf's overlordship was thus a formal recognition—inspired by specific political circumstances—of an older tradition.

In Sweden, on the other hand, it was much later, in the fifteenth century, that the idea of St Erik as the patron saint and guardian of the kingdom became firmly entrenched. Thus in the late 1430s St Erik figured on the seal of the *riksråd*, which had assumed power following the rebellion against the Kalmar-union; the saint represented the eternal values of just Swedish kingship.¹⁰⁵ The concept, however, of St Erik as a patron or celestial lord of particular political factions was much older.¹⁰⁶ Numismatic evidence indicates that the idea was in place as early as the first half of the thirteenth century. A rebellious aristocratic faction, the so-called *Folkungarna*, issued coins during three different insurrections: 1229, 1247–1251 in Svealand and 1278–1280 in Västergötland. In 1229 or shortly afterwards Knut, who descended from St Erik, led the Folkungarna against the reigning king, Erik Eriksson. On this occasion Knut had a coin struck on which he presents himself as *vicarius*, a viceroy, to St Erik. The same was done during the insurrection of the Folkungarna in the late 1270s. The underlying idea was that the Swedish crown could only be held with the consent of St Erik, *rex perpetuus* of the realm.¹⁰⁷

Thus there is a case for concluding that princely saints were seen to have similar relations to the rulers in the other Nordic dominions where the concept of *óðal* was rooted, Norway, Orkney and perhaps Sweden.¹⁰⁸ Kolr's speech quoted above suggests that there was a notion of Orkney as the *óðal* of St Magnús. Indeed it is interesting to note that according to *OS*, Rögnvaldr Kali made the farmers of the earldom purchase their *óðal* possessions once and for all in order to finance the building of St Magnus Cathedral.¹⁰⁹ In the

¹⁰⁵ Lindkvist and Sjöberg 2003, pp. 202.

¹⁰⁶ Thordemann 1960, pp. 16–19.

¹⁰⁷ See Thordemann 1965, pp. 83–91. Sjöberg 1986, pp. 1–13.

¹⁰⁸ Robberstad 1967, col. 494–499. Recently Michael Gelting has argued that the concept of *óðal* was by and large a twelfth-century innovation. Gelting 2000. But before such a conclusion can be accepted the pre-twelfth-century evidence must be thoroughly reviewed. See also Norseng 2005, pp. 208–211.

¹⁰⁹ *OS*, 190. For an interpretation of this event, see Crawford 1987, pp. 201–202.

context of the cults of St Ólafr, St Magnús and (possibly) St Erik the sentiments explored here may throw light on a seldom asked question. Namely, how could a cult of a saintly kinsman help to legitimise the authority of an earthly ruler? From the standpoint of the Church there was certainly no theological basis for the notion that simply being a relative of a saint, whether a son, half-brother or a nephew, made a claim to rulership any stronger. Indeed nowhere in the literature on the Scandinavian princely saints is this view upheld. But from the perspective of Nordic attitudes towards proving and establishing authority over a specific dominion, the importance of a saintly ancestor or kinsman should not be underestimated. In this context the well-known law-amendment (*retterbod*) issued in 1316 by King Hákon VI Magnússon of Norway relating to the selling of ancestral land is of relevance. It stipulates that ownership of the *óðal* should be traced to *haugs ok til heiðni* (literally: to burial mound and to pagan times), that is as far back in time as possible.¹¹⁰ The physical presence of an ancestor in the form of a burial mound provided a valuable proof that the family had held the land for generations.¹¹¹ I would suggest that at least in Orkney, Norway and (possibly) Sweden similar sentiments, albeit on a grander scale, were associated with the cults of the princely saints; the tomb of a saintly kinsman provided a fixed point of reference, both hallowed by divine will, from which the living were able to claim authority from the past.

¹¹⁰ *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. III, ed. by R. Keyser & P. A. Munch (Christiania, 1849), pp. 120–121.

¹¹¹ For a discussion of this topic see Zachrisson 1994 and the extensive bibliography provided there. See also Clunies Ross 2005, p. 52.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the cult of and the hagiography relating to St Magnús, earl of Orkney, and sought to place both within a Scandinavian, and to a certain extent, European context. In the process, various aspects have been examined relating to the phenomenon of sanctity of secular leaders and the associated literature in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Scandinavian lands.

The hagiographic corpus on the Orkney saint is largely preserved in Old Norse sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth century. At least one work on Magnús was written in the twelfth century, a Latin Life composed by a certain *magister* Robert. Although this *vita* may not have been the earliest hagiographic work to deal with St Magnús, it was the one used by the author of *Magnús saga lengri*, composed in my estimation on the occasion of the incorporation of the saint's feast into the Icelandic liturgical calendar in 1326. The hagiographic pattern I have highlighted in the Magnús corpus accords well with other works on Scandinavian princely martyrs, in particular the second Life on the Danish Knud Lavard. A just and popular ruler arouses envy in the mind of a kinsman who finally betrays and kills him. A similar narrative design also appears in English hagiography on princely saints from the tenth and the eleventh centuries and in Lives of Central- and Eastern-European rulers from roughly the same period. Irrespective of the question of influence, it has been established that hagiographers from the more peripheral regions of Christian Europe adopted a similar approach as they confronted the task of presenting the killing of a ruler in terms of martyrdom.

Magister Robert was undoubtedly an Englishman, and as such his viewpoint was that of an outsider interpreting the history of a relatively recently converted region of Christian Europe. From this perspective *magister* Robert's approach can be compared with that of Aelnoth of Canterbury, the second hagiographer of Knud IV of Denmark. Just as the killing of Knud in 1086 represents for Aelnoth the central event in the history of the Danish people, thus the martyrdom of Earl Magnús heralds in Robert's view the final victory of Christianity over paganism in Orkney. The ideal of just rulership—pious life-style and patronage of the Church—is of course duly

stressed. Additionally, there is also a notable emphasis in both works on the salvific effects of the two martyrdoms. In this Robert and Aelnoth are original contributors to Western hagiography on princely saints although, it should emphasised, a similar paradigm appears in a comparable context in eleventh- and twelfth-century hagiography from Central and Eastern Europe.

In another sense *magister* Robert's Life of St Magnús was innovative within the narrow confines of its particular genre. An analysis of those passages attributable to Robert in *MSL* (and other relevant sources), on the one hand, and the hagiography on St Thomas Becket, on the other hand, reveals that the literary corpus on the Canterbury saint influenced the English author. In particular, Robert's use of biblical allusions and comparisons of biblical characters with historical figures points firmly in that direction. Moreover, the correspondence between his Life of Magnús and the Becket sources appears to be largely confined to a textually related corpus of early writing on the English martyr, which includes John of Salisbury's epistolary accounts of the Becket dispute, as well as the Lives of Becket by William of Canterbury and the so-called *Anonymous II*. The most intriguing parallels, however, are between the incompletely preserved Life of the Canterbury martyr by Robert of Cricklade, prior of St Frideswide's in Oxford (who died c. 1180), and the sections attributable to *magister* Robert in the Magnús corpus. Although the identification of Prior Robert with *magister* Robert, the author of the St Magnús *vita*, is not a new one, it has hitherto not been supported by a close examination of the relevant textual corpus. With some confidence it can be claimed that an English author, very likely Robert of Cricklade, wrote (or perhaps re-wrote) a hagiographic work on St Magnús sometime in the 1170s. Indeed in conjunction with the Legends of Knud Lavard and St Ólafr of Norway, this hagiographic work is one of the last to be written about a martyred prince in Western Europe. Although Robert's *vita* is incompletely preserved, the innovative approach he adopted in this composition makes it a worthy swan-song of this genre.

In relation to the emergence of St Magnús' cult it has been emphasised that his local canonization occurred at a pivotal point in the development of the Orkney bishopric. Since the last quarter of the eleventh century the resident bishop had effectively operated as the court-chaplain to one branch of the ruling dynasty, or what can be termed the Páll-line. This situation reflected both the immature

state of the Orkney bishopric and the need of the bishops to protect their position against rival candidates for their office who, moreover, were supported by the archbishopric of York. By the middle of the 1130s, however, the external threat to the resident bishop had receded. Against this background Bishop Vilhjálmr of Orkney elevated the remains of Earl Magnús in December 1135. In one sense the translation of the relics from Birsay to Kirkwall soon thereafter represented a shift in allegiance in respect of the bishop from the Páll-line to the Erlendr-line of the ruling house. But in St Magnús the bishopric acquired both a heavenly patron and a focal point for religious observance that heralded a new stage in its development. From this newfound base the Orkney bishops were able to assert their own authority in relation to the secular arm. There was also, of course, a dynastic dimension to the emergence of the cult. The canonization of a member of the Erlendr-line of the ruling dynasty bestowed lustre, prestige and an added aura of legitimacy on the rule of Rögnvaldr Kali, the earl responsible for commencing the construction of St Magnus Cathedral in 1137/38 or shortly thereafter. Not surprisingly there are numerous examples of princely cults that were promoted for similar purposes in the more peripheral lands of Christian Europe where succession to rulership did not follow any clear-cut procedures. In this sense the interests of the temporal and the ecclesiastical authorities coincided in the promotion of St Magnús' sanctity. A similar pattern can be detected in relation to the better-known princely cults of Scandinavia. In Norway the cult of St Ólafr emerged in a period when the Norwegian Church was still in an embryonic form. Accordingly it was only at a later stage, with the appearance of a resident bishop in Nidaros, that the Church could effectively appropriate the cult for its own purposes. In the second half of the eleventh century the kings of Norway promoted the cult of St Ólafr and identified their own rule with celestial authority of their saintly kinsman. The reign of Haraldr harðráði (1046–1066) was of particular importance in this development and I have suggested that his acquaintance with the cults of Boris and Gleb in Kievan Rus' may have provided him with a model for the promotion of his half-brother's cult.

The canonizations of St Ólafr and Magnús were not undertaken on the initiative of their dynastic successors but by an Anglo-Saxon missionary bishop and an Orkney bishop respectively. A similar pattern can be seen in relation to the origins of the cult of King Knud

of Denmark. In 1095 the ecclesiastical community of Odense elevated the corporal relics of the slain king in order to secure for itself a heavenly patron and, in the process, promote the ideals of Christian kingship. Later in the same year King Erik ejegod was chosen to kingship and it was on his initiative that a papal sanction for the canonization of King Knud IV was secured. The emergence of the cult of St Erik of Sweden is another case where the interest of the temporal and the spiritual authorities came together in the creation of a princely martyr-cult. The establishment of the archbishopric of Uppsala in 1164 and the coming to power of Knut Eriksson in 1167 provided the background for the launching of the cult of the Swedish king. It appears likely that Stephan of Uppsala promoted Erik's cult in order to add prestige to his new archbishopric and also strengthen the legitimacy of Knut's kingship. The one cult that fits uneasily within the pattern presented here above—and in a sense represents the exception which proves the rule—is that of Knud Lavard. Unlike the cults of St Magnús of Orkney, St Ólafr, St Knud of Odense and St Erik of Sweden, his cult was from its conception a dynastic undertaking. Not until 1169/70—with the papal canonization of Knud and the translation at Ringsted—did the interest of Crown and Church converge.

In light of the embryonic state Church for most of our period it is not surprising that ecclesiastics in the Scandinavian lands were willing to recognise the saintly status of rulers. In a society where the organisation of religious life was still in a rudimentary state the obvious choice for sainthood was neither a bishop nor an abbot but rather a figure that was essential for the upholding of Christian life: the secular ruler. Against this backdrop the ecclesiastical centres of Kirkwall in Orkney, Odense in Denmark, Uppsala in Sweden and Nidaros in Norway, all adopted cults of native princely martyrs in order to enhance their stature and serve as foci points for their identity. Additionally, the cults presented an ideal opportunity to promote the ideas of Christian kings in the relatively newly-converted societies. In the same period the secular power was also in a state of transformation from rulership dependant on the personal qualities of the sovereign to a Christian one, where the office of kingship was hallowed by divine will. The emergence of the cults of St Ólafr, St Knud of Odense and St Erik, and to an extent that of St Magnús, can be seen as early attempts to bestow legitimacy on the ruler and his office in the absence of formalised rituals such as coronation and

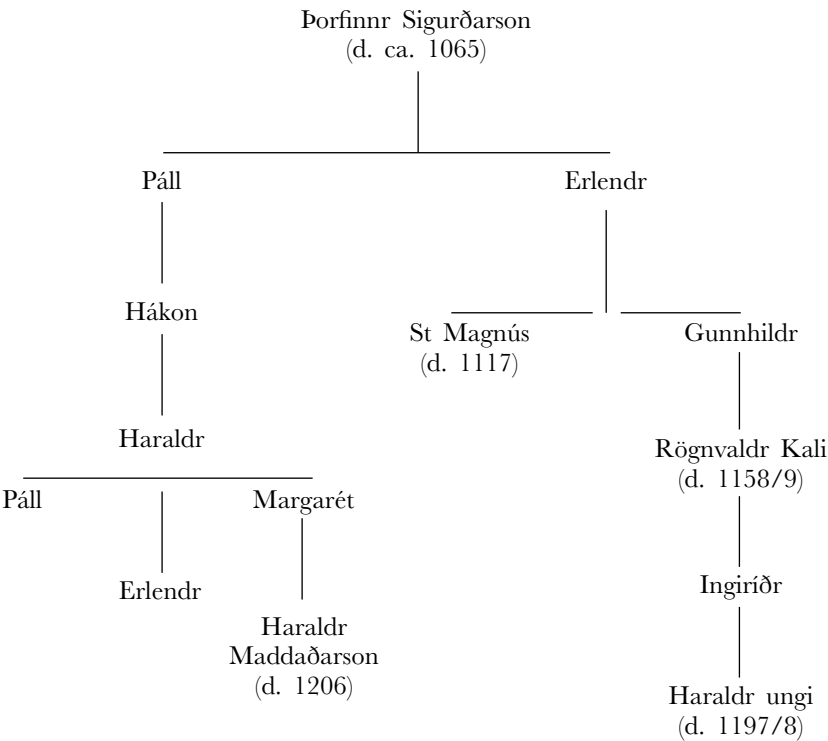
unction. Thus the princely saints' cults must be considered with the relative weakness of both the temporal and spiritual authorities in mind.

I have thus argued that the princely cults of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Scandinavian lands were symptoms of a transitional period in the development of the ecclesiastical and secular authorities. The same holds true in relation to the cults of secular leaders that did not enjoy official promotion by the two authorities. The immature state of the Scandinavian Church and the unsettled political situation provided a fertile ground from which cults of this nature could emerge. However, because the cults appeared in response to particular political circumstances, and were not supported by those in power, their lifespan was brief. Still, considering these were the first, and practically only cases, of popular saints' cults in the Nordic lands, their significance should not be underestimated. Above all they show that in the minds of the Scandinavian people in this period, sanctity was closely aligned with martyrdom. True, martyrdom also figured as a manifestation of sanctity in the more established regions of Christian Europe. There, however, the Church was also in a position to promote cults of confessor saints, the majority of whom were recruited from the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. But it was not until the last quarter of the twelfth century that the Scandinavian Church acquired the self-confidence and authority to effectively introduce cults of that kind.

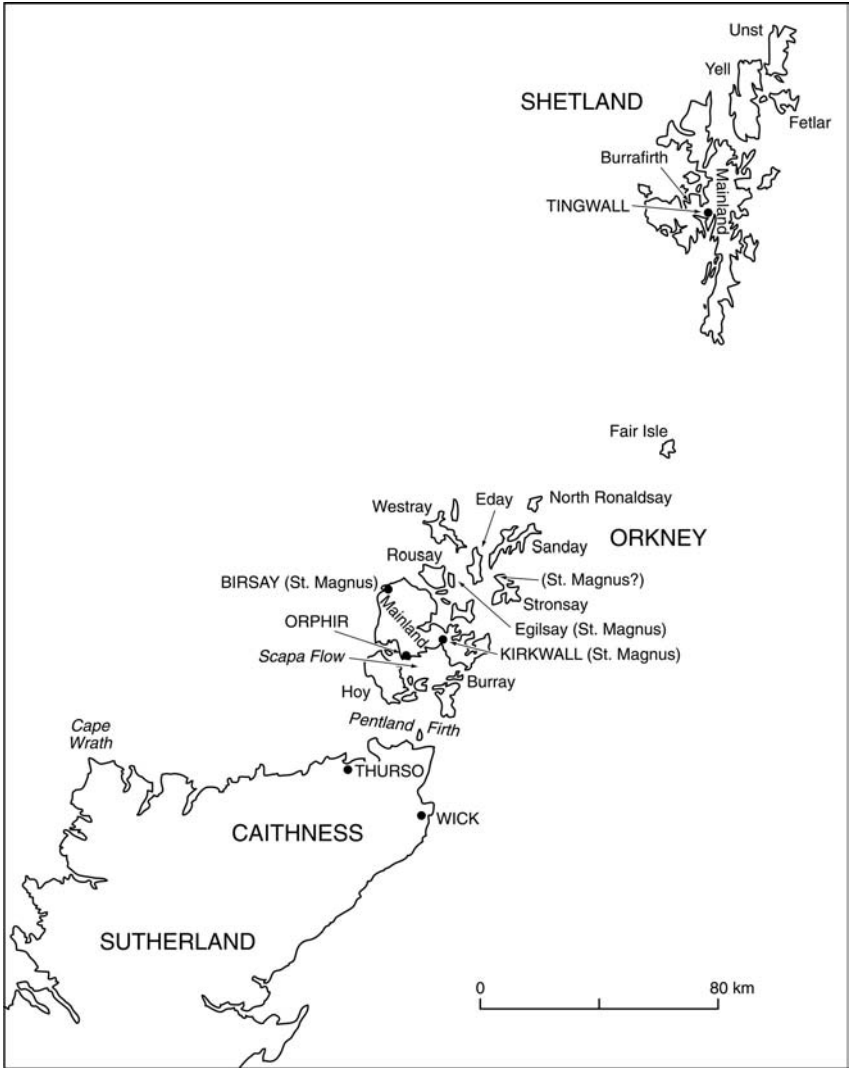
To an extent this has been a study of the manifold manifestations of martyrdom in the two centuries or so following the official conversion of the Norse people to Christianity. As a form of sanctity which was lacking in clear interpretative boundaries, martyrdom was ideally suited to the fluid ecclesiastical and political scene in the Nordic lands in this period. For English hagiographers, ambitious ecclesiastics, aspiring rulers and perhaps followers of lost political causes, it represented different things and was adopted by them for varying purposes. In this respect the words of *magister* Robert, which he borrowed from St Jerome, are fitting: "each one brings into the tabernacle of God such things as he has means to for his own help and grace".¹

¹ "*Þvilíkt færir hverr sem hann hefir föng á í landtjald guðs sér til hjálpar ok miskunnar*". MSL, p. 336. My own translation.

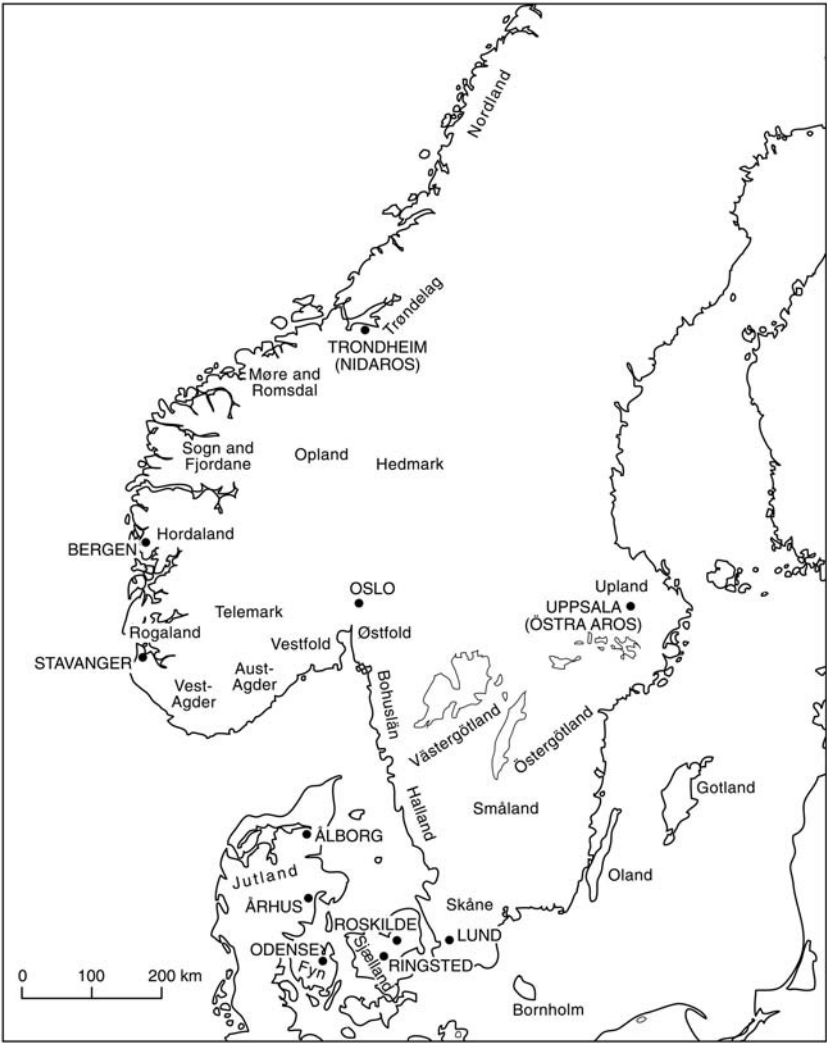
A GENEALOGY OF THE RULING HOUSE OF ORKNEY



MAPS



Scotland



Scandinavia

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